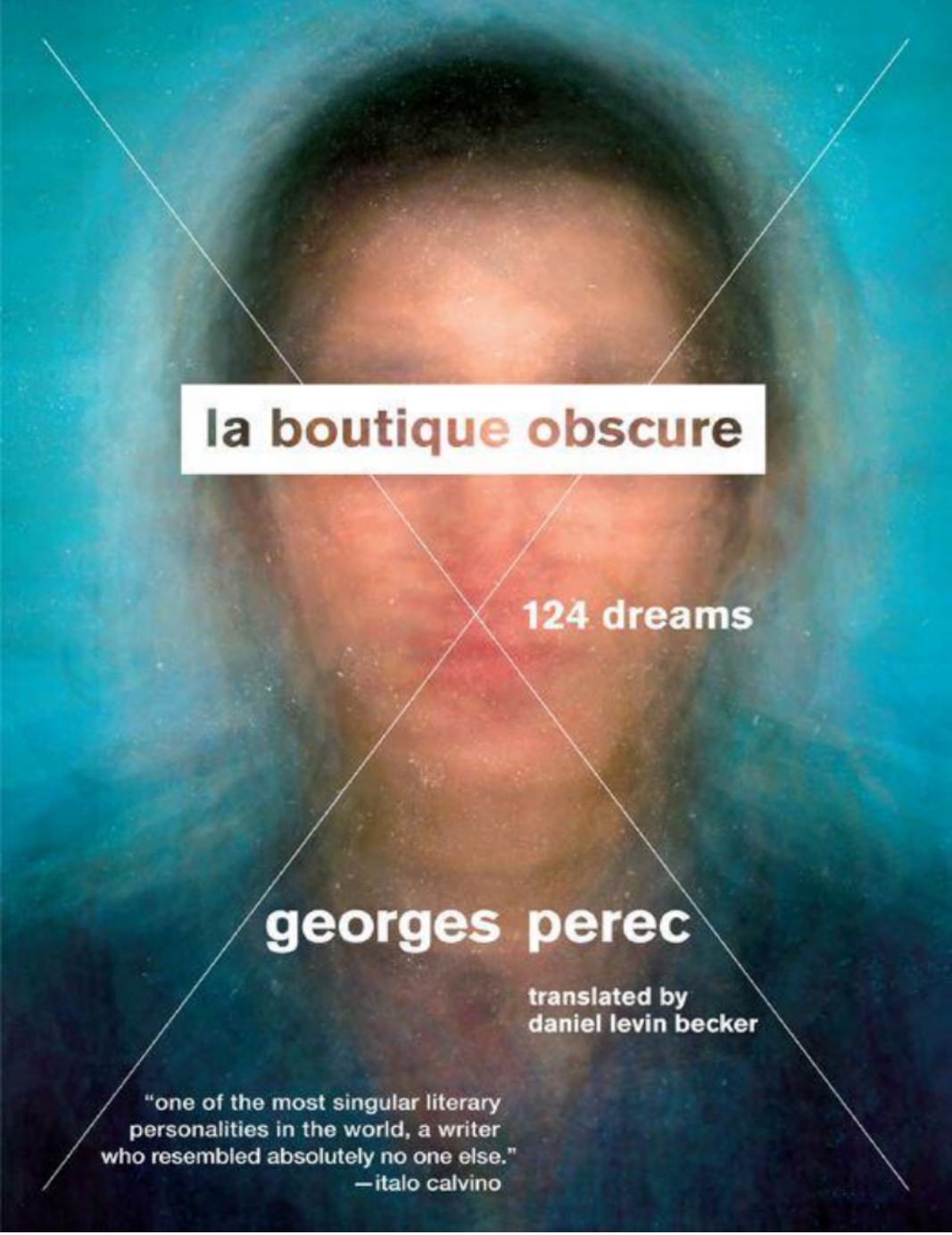
la boutique obscure
124 dreams
georges perec
translated by
daniel levin becker
"one of the most singular literary
personalities in the world, a writer
who resembled absolutely no one else."
—italo calvino

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

The beguiling, never-before-translated dream diary of Georges Perec.

In "La Boutique Obscure" Perec once again revolutionized literary form, creating the world's first "nocturnal autobiography." From 1968 until 1972-the period when he wrote his most well-known works-the beloved French stylist recorded his dreams. But as you might expect, his approach was far from orthodox.

Avoiding the hazy psychoanalysis of most dream journals, he challenged himself to translate his visions and subconscious churnings directly into prose. In laying down the nonsensical leaps of the imagination, he finds new ways to express the texture and ambiguity of dreams-those qualities that prove so elusive.

Beyond capturing a universal experience for the first time and being a fine document of literary invention, "La Boutique Obscure" contains the seeds of some of Perec's most famous books. It is also an intimate portrait of one of the great innovators of modern literature. "From the Trade Paperback edition."

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Georges Perec

La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams

for Nour

since I think
that the real
is in no way real
how am I to believe
that dreams are dreams

Jacques Roubaud and Saigyō Hōshi

layers and lairs[1]
… because a labyrinth leads
only to the outside of itself.

Harry Mathews

Preface

Everyone has dreams. Some remember theirs, far fewer recount them, and very few write them down. Why write them down, anyway, knowing you will only sell them out (and no doubt sell yourself out in the process)?

I thought I was recording the dreams I was having; I have realized that it was not long before I began having dreams only in order to write them.

These dreams — overdreamed, overworked, overwritten — what could I then expect of them, if not to make them into texts, a bundle of texts left as an offering at the gates of that “royal road” I still must travel with my eyes open?

Insofar as I have sought some degree of homogeneity in the transcription and then the composition of these dreams, it seems worth giving a few specifications on their typography and formatting:

— a paragraph break corresponds to a change in time, place, feeling, mood, etc., felt as such within the dream;

— the use of italics, which is rare, indicates a particularly striking element of the dream;

— the greater or lesser size of the gap between paragraphs is meant to correspond to the greater or lesser importance of passages that were forgotten or indecipherable upon waking;

— the sign / / indicates an intentional omission.

No. 1: May 1968

The height gauge

The height gauge (the name escapes me: metronome, perch) where must stay ad. lib. for several hours. Naturally. The armoire (the two hiding places). The rehearsal. Humiliation.?. Arbitrary power.

A scene with several people. There is a height gauge in the corner. I know I am at risk of having to spend several hours under it; it's an act of bullying rather than real torture, but extremely uncomfortable, because there is nothing holding the top of the gauge and, after a while under it, one might shrink.

Naturally, I am dreaming and I know that I am dreaming, naturally, that I am in a prison camp. It's not really a prison camp, of course, but an image of a prison camp, a dream of a prison camp, a prison-camp metaphor, a prison camp I know only as a familiar image, as though I were ceaselessly dreaming the same dream, as though I never dreamed of anything else, as though I never did anything but dream of this prison camp.

It's clear that the threat of the gauge is enough, at first, to concentrate in itself all the terror of the camp. And then it seems it's not so bad. In any case, I escape the threat; it doesn't come to pass. But it is precisely my avoidance of this threat that most clearly proves the essence of the camp: the only thing that saves me is the indifference of the torturer, his liberty to do or not to do; I am entirely at the mercy of his arbitrary power (in exactly the same way as I am at the mercy of this dream: I know it is only a dream, but I cannot escape it).

The second sequence modifies these themes slightly. Two characters (one is without a doubt myself) open an armoire in which two hiding spots have been forged, crammed with deportees' valuables. By "valuables" I mean any objects that could increase the safety and chances of survival of their owner, be they bare necessities or objects with some exchange value. The first hiding spot contains woolens, countless woolens, old and moth-eaten and drab. The second hole, which contains money, is made of a rocker device: one of the armoire's shelves is hollow inside and its cover lifts up like that of a school desk. But this little stash seems unsound, and I am just activating the mechanism that opens it to take the money out when someone enters. An officer. In an instant we understand that all of this

is useless anyway. It also becomes clear that dying and leaving this room are one and the same.

The third sequence could surely, had I not forgotten it completely, have supplied a name for the camp: Treblinka, or Terezienbourg, or Katowice. The performance might have been the *Terezienbourg Requiem* (*Les Temps modernes 196.*, no., pp.… — …). The moral of this faded episode seems to invoke older dreams: we can save ourselves (sometimes) by playing.…

No. 2: November 1968

Tiles

With a laugh that can be described only as “sardonic,” she began to make passes at a stranger, in my presence. I said nothing. She kept it up, so I eventually left the room.

I am in my room with A. and a casual acquaintance, whom I am teaching to play Go. He seems to understand the game, until I realize he thinks he is learning to play bridge. The game actually consists of distributing *letter tiles* (more like a kind of lotto than a kind of Scrabble).

No. 3: November 1968

Itinerary

: known secret maze, doors of chests (round, armored), hallways, very long trek toward the encounter

and then the same path now known to all.

No. 4: December 1968

Illusion
I am dreaming
She is beside me
I tell myself I'm dreaming
But the pressure of her hand against mine feels too strong
I wake up
She really is beside me
Delirious joy
I turn on the lights
Light bursts forth for a hundredth of a second then goes out
(a rattling lamp)
I embrace her

(I wake up: I am alone)

No. 5: December 1968

The dentist

At the end of a maze of covered walkways, a bit like in a souk, I arrive at a dentist's office.

The dentist is out but her son, a young boy, is there. He asks me to come back later, then changes his mind and tells me his mother will be back any moment.

I leave. I run into a tiny woman, pretty and cheerful. It's the dentist. She leads me to the waiting room. I tell her I don't have time. She opens my mouth very wide and bursts into tears as she tells me that all my teeth are rotten *but* that it's not worth treating them.

My mouth, open wide, is immense. I have an almost palpable sensation of total rot.

My mouth is so large, and the dentist so small, that I suspect she is going to put her whole head in my mouth.

Later, I run through the shopping mall. I buy a three-burner gas stove that costs 26,000 francs and a 103-liter refrigerator.

No. 6: January 1969

Farewell

One day, I will tell her I am leaving her. She will call her daughter nearly immediately to say she is not going to Dampierre.

Over the course of the telephone conversation, her pretty face will fall apart.

No. 7: January 1969

On my old days

Despite your certainty that you are still young, you must not be so young anymore, since two of your dearest friends are already dead and a third is dying …

It was like those Flaubert letters: “We have buried Jules …” (or is it Edmond?).

Who were those two dead friends? Wasn’t one of them Claude? Régis?

No. 8: September 1969

In the métro

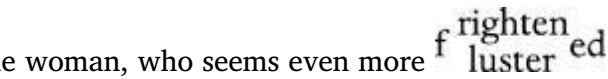
After what might have been countless adventures, I manage to board the train just as it's preparing to leave, as the dull black automatic doors are already closing.

The compartment is long and narrow, almost empty. There is only an immensely tall woman on the other side of the car, lying over several seats — not across a row but down the length of the car, her feet roughly where I am and her head almost at the other end of the compartment.

(Suddenly) I feel something (someone) gently running (a hand) through my hair.

I am frightened.

I shout.

It is certainly not the woman, who seems even more f  ed than I am.

No. 9: September 1969

Sinusitis

I spoke with a doctor for a long time about my sinus infections.

No. 10: October 1969

Writers

In a store, or rather at a large carnival, something like the Fête de l'Humanité. There is a large crowd. We arrange to meet in one place and then another.

I step out "to be introduced to some Soviet writers." They greet me but then, to my great disappointment, nobody pays me any attention; everyone is listening to Armand Lanoux nearly immediately to say she is not going to Dampierre (I have never seen him before; he looks nothing like I imagined he would), who is speaking in Russian (which I understand without the slightest difficulty) about his ten books that have been translated in the USSR. I am shocked by the number ten, and I mentally correct it to something like "ten times the same thing"

I belong to a group of hippies. We stop traffic on a national highway. We have surrounded a luxury car and are closing in on it, threateningly.

No. 11: October 1969

The death of Helmlé

I receive a letter from Germany in which I learn that Eugen Helmlé is dead. I had written to him the night before.

Bit by bit, I understand that I am dreaming and that Eugen Helmlé is not dead.

No. 12: October 1969

Go

I am playing Go (though it's more like a puzzle whose pieces finally form a sort of sphere) with a writer named Bourgoin, whom I find fairly unpleasant.

I am on rue de l'Assomption and I decide to go to Dampierre. I head toward a café at the end of the street, then veer off in the direction of la Muette. I am furious.

Maybe it's in Dampierre, or still on rue de l'Assomption? The place is under repair, even though they're holding a reception, whence the presence — rather surprising at first — of workers in the middle of the sitting room. A writer enters; I realize I have his book in my hand and am playing (fanning myself?) with it.

J. and M.L. appear to have made up and are playing Go together. A bit later I walk in on them kissing in a dusty room, which looks like my old office on rue du Bac. A workman comes to tear out the doorpost, saying, in a very technical manner:

"It has beveled edges."

The post carries electrical wires, so there is a brief blackout. I remark to myself that he is an excellent electrician and that it will be easier to remove the furniture this way.

Three workers (one of whom is the gardener from Dampierre) are building an outdoor living room.

I have a scene with

No. 13: February 1970

The hotel

I am looking to rent an apartment for a month. Someone whose job is to sell or rent apartments suggests that I go to a hotel instead, and recommends La Boule Blanche, in the middle of Saint-Germain. As it turns out, I know that hotel by name, but I've never been there.

La Boule Blanche is on a very calm square, not unlike the Square Louis-Jouvet, near the Opera (where the Cintra bar is). It reminds me of another hotel, not far off, where one of my friends either went or told P. (or maybe me) to go.

A rather *fin-de-siècle* congress is being held in the hotel. The reading rooms are packed, the tables strewn with outspread newspapers.

I turn around in a circle, looking for the hotel office, and end up asking someone, who tells me:

"But it's right there."

It is, in fact, right there. It looks a bit like my writing desk, but curved. Three young women are behind it.

They whisper to me that there have been many departures and that I will have no trouble getting a room. Just now, three or four gentlemen are returning their keys.

I want to ask for a room, but by mistake I ask for a suite. They ask me why. I explain that I am in the middle of changing apartments and that I wish to move in for a month.

Two of the three employees talk amongst themselves and decide to show me the bridal suite.

It's at the very top of the hotel. We take the stairs up. In the small entryway there is a carved lamp whose base represents a headless naked woman gripping or strangling a boa constrictor coiled around her. The woman and the snake are made of wood, but the imitation is so perfect that you could believe, for a moment, that they are alive.

I tour the suite, which consists of two rooms connected by a small staircase.

I try to explain that a room, a large room, would be fine for me. Then, changing the subject, I ask what brands of whiskey they have at the bar. They answer with a certain number of words ("long john," "glen," "mac," etc.) and then the word "Chivas," which they repeat several times until it loses its shape (chavass, chivelle, etc.).

Then I ask what they have in the way of vodka. They answer with a word that ends in "ya": I hear "Denitskaya" or "Baltiskaya." I am

pleased that it is an authentic vodka …

No. 14: February 1970

Ski-hunting

A film that I am (a) watching as it is being filmed, (b) seeing in the theater, or (c) acting in.

Somewhere in the forest. Hunting scene. We are in the middle of the woods. Maybe there is snow.

The hunters curse the poachers, who are always a few steps ahead, hunting their game and thinning its population.

The shot moves (pan, lateral). *I am very far off-screen.*

Four forms pass, hairy, bearded, covered in furs: the poachers.

Then, on skis, the "Lead Hunter," then the cameraman, who is carrying a ridiculous contraption on his back, then the sound engineer, also heavily loaded, then, etc., the rest of the crew.

They are walking backwards, on skis, bringing in the poachers. Close-up of their skis, which look quite strange, like they have heels.

Among the smugglers, an old Jewish woman, very ugly, extremely unpleasant (like an anti-Semitic caricature).

She is wearing an expensive fur coat.

I speak to her as we return to the village; in principle, she could take part in a real hunt (and even have her own), but she prefers to hunt other people's game.

I tell her she is at risk of being pursued and of seeing her name dishonored.

The rest is confused: we speak of slander, of fines.

The scandal must be kept quiet.

No. 15: May 1970

La rue de Quatrefages

P. and I are living in the building on rue de Quatrefages, at the very back of the yard, no longer on the fifth floor but on the ground floor. We are living separately, which is to say we have separated our apartment in two. After some complicated construction, we even end up sharing the apartment with our neighbor.

I am touring the apartment. The first two rooms are familiar; it's basically our old apartment on rue de Quatrefages. Then you come to a curious part: a bizarrely furnished kitchen. There is a tiny ceramic basin (a "scullery sink") whose faucet is open over a covered casserole pot (a "hot-dish") larger than the sink (which can suggest only imminent overflow …); above the sink, there is an immense glass fume hood (a "sorbonne"); it's glass but it's barely clear, more like "bumpy" (fluted?) glass; also notable: the hood is completely detached from the wall, the length of which is lined with water and gas pipes, and actually has to be suspended from the ceiling. There is also a gas cooker with plates simmering on it.

Past the kitchen is a large bathroom with a trapezoidal bathtub. Then a hallway and, at the very end, a somewhat worm-eaten wooden door. This is how I discover, for the first time in my life, that my apartment has two doors; I vaguely suspected as much, but I (finally?) have tangible proof.

I open the door. Immediately the three cats who live in the apartment run out. There is one white cat and two grey cats, one of which is certainly my cat. No big deal, they'll definitely be back; obviously it's through this door, and not the other, that P. usually lets them out.

I look through the keyhole (which is round and eye-sized). I see the avenue, wide, lined with trees and a few stores, including a restaurant.

P. is asleep in the apartment. She has found only one of the cats. He was on rue Mortimer.

I realize, first of all, that the first room of the apartment belongs jointly to P. and to the neighbor, and, second, that this is not my apartment, that I have never lived here.

In the first room, the neighbor's section and P.'s are separated by a heap of books. The neighbor, a fairly old and rather boorish woman, can no longer tell which of these books she has borrowed from P., nor which she has finished reading and wishes to return.

She hands me a very pretty book, a bit like the Hetzel editions of Jules Verne. I quiver with joy: the title of the book is

LUNGS

It's an extremely rare book, a classic of respiratory physiology that I remember hearing G. mention. I open it. It is written in German (in Gothic characters).

I recognize, in the heap of books, many familiar volumes (the Queneau-Massin-Carelman edition of *Exercises in Style*, books by Steinberg, etc.).

The neighbor's husband arrives. He is an old, tired man. He has no mustache. Or, rather, he has one. He looks a bit like the actor André Julien, or maybe like André R., the father of one of my old classmates. In his hand is a case shaped like a large ballpoint pen, which is full either of many ballpoint pens or of one enormous pen with — let's say — twelve colors. He nods, looking displeased.

Later: I am lying on a bed, next to the pile of books. In front of me, to my left, P. is spread out on another bed, perpendicular to mine. In front of P.'s bed, across from me, there is a long table with the husband sitting behind it (just across from me) and (on my right) the neighbor, who has a tiny electric battery in front of her.

Long before, P. and I were in the street. We were wandering in a lovely park, as pretty as the Jardin des Missions Étrangères on rue de Varenne.

No. 16: July 1970

The arrest

I am in Tunis. It is a vertically sprawling city. I'm on a very long walk: winding roads, lines of trees, fences, panoramas. It's as if the whole landscape turned out to be the background of an Italian painting.

The next day, the police come to arrest me. Long ago I committed a minor infraction. I no longer have any memory of it, but I know that today it could cost me twenty years.

I flee, armed with a revolver. The places I pass through are unfamiliar. There is no immediate danger, but I know already that my flight won't solve anything. I go back to places I know, where I had been walking the previous night. Three sailors ask me for directions. Behind a line of trees, women in veils wash laundry.

I return to town on a winding road. There are cops everywhere, hundreds of them. They're stopping everyone and searching vehicles.

I pass between the cops. As long as I don't make eye contact, I have a chance of making it out.

I go into a café, where I find Marcel B. I sit down near him.

Three men enter the café (cops, obviously!); they make a halfhearted search of the room. Maybe they haven't seen me? I almost breathe a sigh of relief, but one of them comes and sits down at my table.

"I don't have my papers on me," I say.

He is about to stand and leave (which would mean I'm saved), but he says to me in a low voice:

"Copulate!"

I don't understand.

He writes the word in the margin of a newspaper, in huge bubble letters:

then he goes back over the first three letters, filling them in:

Eventually I get his drift. It's extremely complicated: I am to go home and "have marital relations with my wife" so that, when the

police come for me, the fact of “copulating” on a Sunday will constitute for me, being Jewish, an aggravating circumstance.

My being Jewish is, of course, at the root of this whole affair and complicates it considerably. My arrest is a consequence of the Judeo-Arab conflict and affirming my pro-Palestinian sentiments will do me no good.

I return to my villa (which might be just a single room). Most of all I want to know whether I will be a Tunisian prisoner in France or a French prisoner in Tunisia. Either way, I anticipate an amnesty during a visit from a head of state.

I feel innocent. What bothers me most is having to go for several years without being able to change my dirty socks.

No. 17: July 1970

The switch

"One fine morning," I am once again in a concentration camp. It's time to get up; the challenge is to find clothes (I am dressed in everyday attire, tweed jacket, English shoes).

In the camp, everything is for sale. I see rolls of large bills in circulation. The guardians give potions to the detainees.

Someone finds me a jacket. We line up to go down (we're in a large dormitory on the second floor of a sort of repurposed barrack).

We hide for a moment in a hallway.

We walk in quadruple file. An officer lines us up with a long bamboo switch. He is kind at first, then suddenly he begins to insult us horribly.

In line for roll call. The officer is still shouting but not striking anyone. At one point, each of us (he and I) is holding an end of the switch; I am overcome with panic at the prospect of him hitting me.

The universe of the camp is unbroken: nothing can be done to affect it.

Later, I burst into tears while passing a tent where children with an incurable disease are being treated. Their only chance of survival is here. I wonder if this survival doesn't consist in their being turned into pills, which reminds me of an anecdote about dieting cures that work because the dieters are told to ingest pills that actually contain a tapeworm.

No. 18: August 1970

Vergelesses

I am with her at a restaurant.

I look at a menu that is very extensive but contains only dishes that are both dull and overpriced (for instance, a hot dog with fries for twelve francs).

I consult the wine list and suggest that we order “vergelesses.”

No. 19: August 1970

The roll of bills

An American-style comedy. It's one of those stories we've all heard before, and where we already know what happens next.

There's a whole group of us. The police arrest us once, then a second time (but they have to let us go) and a third time, when the impunity we were hoping for no longer works.

Finally, the Chief of Police sets us free and gives us back our money.

Three famous actors, wrinkled like old Western heroes (Stewart, Fonda, etc.) are seated at a table, smiling as they handle thick rolls of dollars.

Wide shot: a roll of blue and yellow bills, differing only by the digit: $500, $500, $100, etc., a long stretch of $1 bills in the middle, then back to large denominations.

In the meantime, I learn that I'm going to be a father, then that I am: the child was born, I wasn't even told.

I walk down a long hallway, trying to think of a suitable name: it needs to be very short (like Jorg') or very long. Didier, for instance, would not work.

It's a girl. Her name is something like Didière or Denise. She has very skinny legs with socks and little white shoes. She seems rather unhappy to see me.

While kissing her, I happen to tear off a tiny piece of her tongue *in development* (flesh not yet fully firm). I worry that this will harm her growth.

It's not my wife who is looking after the girl but rather a friend of hers.

No. 20: August 1970

C.

Weekend in Dampierre. C. and one of his friends arrive. I talk to him about a project for a television adaptation of *The Raise*. Someone else proposed a similar project to me recently.

C. tells me he's the one behind the project, that he had talked about it to (neither one of us manages to remember the name).

(I don't remember anything else when I wake up, but all of this seems so logical that I remain convinced that the scene is plausible, even real).

No. 21: September 1970

S/Z

I go back to that bookstore where the books, most of them used, are stacked, or rather heaped, in a corner.

I'm looking for a particular book, but the bookseller says she doesn't have it. Z. and I browse a few other titles.

I find a book; I recognize the name of the author, but nothing more; it's a huge collection, or dictionary, of S/Z variations in the works of Balzac.

Each page has four columns:

Attested term : S : Z : Use reference

: : :

: : :

: : :

The "attested term" and "use reference" columns give explanations, the "S" and "Z" columns indicate all the transformed words. Thus:

: Balsac : Balzac :

: Maissé : Maizsé :

: : :

(Maissé is the name of a character, and Maizsé, which at first I do not understand, is — of course! how could I forget? — the name of a village in Poland.)

This goes on for pages and pages. Each term, or rather each pair, is so evident that it seems odd that it didn't occur to anybody earlier, shocking that we had to wait for Roland Barthes to notice it.

Leafing backward through the book, Z. shows me a series of epigraphs (in red?) at the beginning of a chapter. The first says something like "Perec gives up his letters"; it's an excerpt from an article about *A Void*, but I can't find the name of the author or the name of the newspaper; I am quite pleased with it, as if this quotation were a sign of recognition (of being taken seriously).

The author of the book is a woman and I remember having read one of her novels.

No. 22: August 1970

Initials

Two of my old friends (let's say one is Pierre B., whom I have not seen in ten years are in Dampierre. A third — he has the same name as a manager whom I hear about sometimes but have never seen — may have been arrested. Someone asks if he is G.P. No, I exclaim. Maoist or P.C., then. I take that to mean P.C.F. and remark: that's not the same thing, though! But the other one specifies: P.C.M.L.F.

Most of the terms in this dream are like crossword clues.

No. 23: September 1970

To the South
When I wake up, only one word remains:
Marseilles
We were heading South.

We had already been there, but we were coming from another town.

No. 24: September 1970

Cats

After various perambulations, I am back in the building on rue de Quatrefages (or is it rue des Boulangers? or rue de Seine?).

I'm going from the back room to the front. Denis B. is there (or is it Michaud?).

On the ground, cats. At least three. Tiny little balls of fur. I shout: I said loud and clear that I won't have that a cat here! I take one of the cats, walk to the door, and toss it out. Then I notice that between the floor and the door there's a space large enough for a small cat to enter.

Anyway, the whole house is an utter mess.

The downstairs neighbor has a gigantic chimney in his house. He makes a fire and my room burns. Beneath the ashes of the floorboards you can see pieces of masonry and bits of iron from the frame. My friend asks with dismay what we're going to do. But I'm not in the least bit disturbed and I calmly go down the list of things that need to be done.

No. 25: September 1970

Two plays

I am to be in two plays.

A recent walk-on part revealed my acting talent and I was cast on the spot.

At the moment I'm supposed to enter, I realize that I haven't rehearsed, nor even read my part once.

The scene takes place in a large hall-cafeteria-dormitory-canteen. The actors are seated at a table. I take the remaining empty seat, right at the front of the stage.

I'm playing a tramp. On the table is a piece of paper with some lines on it, but an actor next to me (who is also the director) leans over and whispers that it's not my part.

I am stricken with unease. A bit later, though, someone manages to pass me a sheet (of something like butcher paper) with a few notes from the script. I have to make do with winks from my partners to know when it's my turn to speak.

The play begins.

I am lost. I'm sure I'm saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment. Happily, the author has written a very disjointed play, a hullabaloo.

After quite a while of considerable discomfort (I'm ruining everyone else's work), riot police arrive in the back of the auditorium.

It's part of the play.

Great confusion.

On to the second play.

It's an act with three characters. I am playing the bear (or maybe the devil?) and across from me are either Faust and Marguerite or Don Juan and Faustine. Someone brings me fur for my costume. I'm not worrying much about my lines; my part consists chiefly of grunts.

I learn that the role was in fact written for Roger Blin, who's supposed to take over for me after this performance, and I find it hilarious to "create a role for Blin to reprise."

The first play, was it actually a rehearsal? In any case, the second is not performed.

No. 26: October 1970

The S-shaped bar

I am with Pierre G. in my room. My bed is covered in plastic foam cubes wrapped in transparent plastic casings. Good thing, because water is dripping from the walls and ceiling. For that matter, it's as though the walls and ceiling are just a single network of multicolored tubes. Everything is soaked. Pierre explains that the people upstairs are having their bathtub redone (refitted).

There is a table next to the bed and on the table a telephone off its hook. I sense that if I hang it up, it will begin to ring (actually, maybe it's even ringing now, even though it's off the hook). I hang up; nothing happens.

Later, Pierre and I are in a large drugstore. At one point I find myself alone in the book aisle. All the books are shelved flat and covered in pale-colored jackets (mauve, blue, light grey, rose, lavender, etc.). I realize that they're all erotic books. The titles are mostly quite short, usually just a female first name (Fabienne, Irene). I don't recognize the authors' names (pseudonyms, no doubt).

Pierre and I come to a huge room where we think we can get something to eat or drink. But the maitre d' directs us to a bar farther down, on the other side of a large picture window.

We each take a glass. One is a tapered whiskey tumbler, the other a handsome stemmed glass with an egg-shaped swelling near the base. On the other side of the window, another large room with a staircase leading up to the restaurant. The maître d' points us to it, but we only want drinks, and he leads us to the bar. The bar is very long. It is shaped like an S. On the other side of the counter, several large young men, athletic types with crew cuts, are playing dice on a round tray that they seem to be supporting on their knees. The bartender hands us drinks. Someone asks if the dice players are from the university, but they respond by shaking their heads no and they seem to find the suggestion very amusing.

No. 27: October 1970

Change

I'm supposed to fly to Venice, and later go to Toulouse to pay my taxes. Tricky money-changing issues. By going through Italy I save a great deal of money. But obviously I can't declare it.

Great confusion.

I am carrying a check (for 5,000, 30,000, or 50,000 francs) and a single 500-franc bill.

I'm supposed to pay 6,000 francs, which seems exorbitant to me. Moreover, I realize that, although it's Thursday, I can only be in Italy on Saturday and all the banks will be closed. I should have left the same night.

All of this is happening in transit from counter to counter, in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of a major airport.

I realize that this trip is completely useless in any case, since this banking operation could have been done a bit later during my trip to Germany.

No. 28: October 1970 (Neuweiler)

The epidemic

The dreamer (this whole story is like a novel in the third person) has sat down at a little bistro. He is foreign, but they quickly come to treat him like a regular. The boss and some of the customers are discussing the epidemic. The Chinese cook of the restaurant enters (the dreamer thinks he looks like someone he knows); the Chinese cook says they need to find a replacement for him, because he can no longer continue to man the stoves and cook for the girls. On this note he cites a Shakespearean proverb:

"They died not all, but all were sick!"

Stunned, the owner of the café looks at the dreamer: he's the one who taught him the proverb. At that instant the dreamer understands that he is no longer a stranger at some table and that he is now the "central character"; at the same time, he recognizes the Chinese cook; he knows only him; he's the one who comes from time to time to volunteer for the girls.

There has been a great cholera epidemic. Everyone wants to be examined. The symptom is spitting up blood. The dreamer and two of his friends walk around the town. They arrive in front of a stairway blocked by a mass of young girls, surely a boarding school. They pretend to have priority, like one of them has been stricken, so that the doctor has to look after them first. The doctor has to clear a path through the girls.

A bit later, in a crowd of girls splayed out, sick, the dreamer picks up a piece of earth (and not a piece of trash or of feces) from the ground. And he discovers, behind a door, his friend J., laid flat, dead, turned into earth, turned into a block of earth that is missing the piece the dreamer just picked up.

No. 29: November 1970

London

I am in a foreign city. It's London, an outlying neighborhood, far from Waterloo or Victoria.

I'm in a group of tourists wandering around a large drugstore. We meet another group, whom I'm supposed to know. Indeed, everyone seems familiar, looks like or could look like someone I know. I'm quite embarrassed. I offer a lot of vague smiles.

In any case, it's clear that one of my old friends, Jacques M., is in the second group. He has grown a beard. There are also friends of his, whose last name is Fried. On the other hand, Jacques's wife, Marianne, is in my group.

I realize then that Jacques and Marianne are separated.

The next morning, I run into Marianne and tell her that Jacques is there. She heads toward him, then suddenly veers off. I follow her.

We pass in front of a group of girls. One of them recoils in horror at my approach.

No. 30: November 1970

GABA

My boss pays me 82 francs (3 × 16) instead of 45 (3 × 15) for having served for three days as a fake subject in his experiment.

I propose that he put the money into a slush fund, but he shakes his head no.

He asks where my file is.

I think of GABA (gamma hydroxybutyric acid), then of presynaptic excitation, which is — evidently — synaptic excitation, and of presynaptic inhibition.

(long feeling of strangeness upon waking)

No. 31: November 1970

The group

of what may have been a large countryside party, an opera full of twists and turns, there remains the image — static, almost petrified, insidiously upsetting — of a group: Four characters à la Watteau, two men, a woman, a man…….

No. 32: November 1970

An evening at the theater

I was, with Z., at a public event that Aragon and Elsa Triolet were also attending. Elsa Triolet, a small and gentle woman, waved to me, which surprised me because we don't know one another.

Later.

We are at the theater.

I am packed in right near the stage, just above the illuminated walkway. At one point one of the actors, who had been sitting with his back to the audience, rises and begins to count off time like a conductor. We hear music from backstage. First it's just a harpsichord, then a whole orchestra. A character on the right begins to sing. It's the end of the play. I am overwhelmed, even as I realize there's nothing to it and wonder vaguely why I appear to be the only one at all moved.

The exit of the theater is mobbed.

I am with Z. at the top of the stairs. Elsa Triolet walks by below, toward another exit perpendicular to ours. Once again she tilts her head toward me. I tell Z.: "That's Elsa Triolet." Z. asks how small I was when I met her and tells me she's going to introduce me to someone who knew me even smaller. But all of this is said in such a way that I can't tell whether we're talking about a woman or a man, and whether she really means "even smaller than I am."

We go home.

My uncle, a bald man, is following us. I recognize him as Z.'s current lover. Walking in front of my uncle and somehow losing him, Z. brings me into a little dormitory, a dark room I identify as one of the annexes of the house in Dampierre.

We tumble down onto a bed. Z. presses against me, panting slightly, but I sense that she plans to rejoin my uncle and wants me to stay here. All told, she doesn't seem entirely sure what she's going to do. In any case, I tell her, I don't feel like sleeping anywhere besides my room.

No. 33: November 1970

The esplanade

A cluster of cops in capes gathers on a large esplanade; not riot police, but rather policemen marking the perimeter for a celebrity to pass through.

I find myself surrounded by cops. I am naked, or only in my underwear, but the cops seem to find this normal.

At one point, I run.

I make it to a car with J. standing nearby. My clothes are on the ground, in the mud, filthy. I find a sock, but I can't put it on.

We want to take the car (so I can change inside). In front, in the driver's seat, there is an enormous turd; we wipe it away with a curtain.

Later, J. and I are driving. We are circling a movie theater. A huge animated advertisement announces an erotic film: two neon silhouettes, a man and a woman, in all sorts of positions (implying permutation and recurrence): man and woman on their backs, man on woman, woman on man, man and woman face down, etc.

No. 34: November 1970

The double apartment

There are many double houses and apartments, i.e. where two families live, separated by a common room. The L. family and P. and I share one. Marianne M. comes to see us. We go to meet her downstairs; she comes up in the elevator with a stranger who she tells me is her husband, but it's no use trying to recognize him: I don't.

A small bathroom: the toilet bowl is full of shit. I'm surprised, and a little relieved, that it doesn't smell bad. While closing the lid, I get a bit of shit on my thumb. J. points me toward the sink. I have to rub for a long time before the stain goes away, then suddenly my hand turns black.

A small station, maybe in England.

P. and I have been here several times. There is an open-air newspaper kiosk. P. takes a newspaper and forgets to pay for it.

No. 35: December 1970

1

At the café

M.K. is visiting my apartment. She brings a glass of water from the shower to the kitchen and pours it on a black coffee table. The water spreads out without spilling over, making the surface of the table shine like an instant oil slick.

2

Dampierre. The guests are gathering in the dining room. Z. comes down, looking stunningly pretty. I lead her into a small room, narrow as a passageway. I tell her I'm going to leave her. She says:

"I'm still going to give you a"

(the noun escapes me: tribute, diploma, secret, tablet). She places a necklace around my neck.

3

I am in a bed with P. We're actually in a café, with a fairly large number of people, but nobody is surprised to see us in bed, nor are we bothered by it. Still, I tell myself, it's curious to make love in a café; even if we furl ourselves in the sheets as much as we can, you can still see the movement of the covers. Anyway, we begin a complicated gymnastics of undressing. It's simple enough for me, but for P. it's much trickier.

At one point she gets up and unhooks her bra. Her breasts are swollen and purple, spangled with stains, or rather with hematomata from exceptionally voracious suction, prolonged and repeated. I am jealous of the man who did this to her.

She rises, gets out of the bed wearing nothing but a transparent T-shirt, goes to put a record on the player and announces the song to the people in the café, then goes into a slightly more discreet corner, takes off her T-shirt and comes back to bed, hiding most of her breasts and privates with her arms and the bit of fabric.

Now someone serves us food on a long table alongside our bed, where two diners are already seated. They toss us a menu: appetizers, entrée and dessert. I order only a steak. They put in front of me a very strange dish, telling me it's an appetizer, then that no, it's a dessert for the diner at the end of the table. My steak arrives, but it looks terrible.

No. 36: December 1970

At the department store

I am in New York with P. We want to go to a department store whose roof we saw over the tops of some houses.

We're in a car. I don't know who's driving. We have trouble orienting ourselves and eventually take one-way streets in the wrong direction.

We get to the department store and go into the elevator. The floors are indicated by a black needle on a circular dial, like on a pendulum. We arrive on the 10th floor, but the needle says it's the 2cd.

We get off the elevator. We're in the home linens aisle. P. looks at beach and bath towels; she actually wants to buy sheet bleach or bleach sheets.

Almost everyone is speaking French, but with American phrases mixed in. I exchange some words with two men. Then two other men appear, young and completely naked.

They go down the stairs. One of their backs is covered in little dry round patches that overlap like roof shingles. I think (or say) "multiple sclerosis," then I correct myself: "dermosclerosis."

I leave P. to go look in another aisle. I take the elevator again. This time, the floor indicator seems to move at random; at first it calls to mind a wet wristwatch, then I realize there's a double mechanism operating the arrow, the first corresponding to floor and the second connected to a clock. Indeed, there is not one but two sets of numbers on the dial, one set larger and in black, the other tiny and in red.

Getting off the elevator, I find P. At the foot of the elevator is a packet (a Moses basket) containing a purse that P. lost the previous night in the river, and two packets of sheet bleach, which consists of little white balls, sort of like naphthalene, that whiten sheets in the wash.

No. 37: December 1970

The plasterer

I am back in Dampierre for a big party. I'm confident and optimistic but, in the immense kitchen and the many dining rooms, a crowd of people who are all more or less familiar, but neither Z. nor her children. I look for her in the park.

Shouts are heard: Niki! Niki! Niki arrives with her seventeen dogs, who jump on me and nearly knock me over, but then they prove affectionate and frisky. Though she's met me only once, Niki shakes my hand enthusiastically and suggests that I call H., one of our mutual friends, to invite him to join us on Wednesday. Alas, I tell her, on Wednesday I won't be there anymore.

I walk through kitchens and dining rooms again. There are more and more people and there's not enough food for everyone. The crowd is getting restless. New arrivals are announced (Z.? food?). People watch the road with binoculars; it's a straight road that goes on forever, but no sign of any arrivals.

Did I see C.? Did I see S.? Did they tell me their mother was waiting for me? Her room is dark, but at one point I saw a hand wiping a window (the glass of a small square window) with a red-checkered handkerchief (Vichy).

A bit later.

Maybe Z. is in the children's building. It's a cardboard house. To enter the ground floor, you have to first cross an extremely narrow but apparently extensible hallway. I go in head first, wondering whether — or rather almost not being surprised that — my shoulders will fit. I've already made it half of the way, but inside I see a worker appear (without knowing why, I call him a plasterer): he is coming from the staircase to Z.'s quarters and going toward another staircase. He is holding an electric drill with a heavy-duty sander on it.

I pull myself out of the duct, which almost seems to come with me, nearly collapsing the whole structure.

At my feet there is someone whom I take at first for a small child, a thin and puny being with an elongated head and skinny little limbs.

The children's building is now a two-story caravan with a wood and copper double door (like the door of a sleeper car). I want to go in through this door, and so does the small child, but I take him by the scruff of the neck and throw him back out. I realize then that it's a small animal, a bit like a cartoon skunk. It scratches and bites me. It looks mean.

I make it into the caravan. It's my room. Z.'s might be upstairs, but it seems less and less certain that Z. is even there.

The animal has managed to enter partway between the first and second doors. Suddenly I am so frightened that it will make it into my room, then scare me by hiding in the nooks and crannies, that I decide to kill it. I lay it across my lap; I squeeze its neck, it fights back, but weakly. It looks harmless (frightened, resigned, big sad eyes); its slender paws twitch in furtive little jolts. I squeeze harder. I realize I'm killing it, and soon it's a small, motionless child. The pressure in his neck veins has increased, grown stronger and stronger, and suddenly stopped.

(I wake up, fingers all numb, soaked in sweat)

A bit later (waking dream)

I am in a dark room. In front of me is a door open onto a dimly lit room. A woman with grey hair and wearing a long dress comes and goes.

But what had been innocuous thus far, not even upsetting, is all at once horrifying: it's the same woman as that character in *Psycho* (a young madman dressed like his elderly mother), the sight of whom (in Sfax, ten years earlier) had disturbed me so much that the whole of the night after I was kept awake just remembering my panic and hearing, under the bed and other furniture, noises made by an imaginary animal.

THREE DREAMS FROM J. L.

No. 38: 1966

The Palais de la Défense, I

I am in the Palais de la Défense. It is crumbling.
I rush down a staircase with my wife.

No. 39: 1968

The stone bridge
A stone bridge, at the crossing of a road and a river.

A signal sign indicates the name of the place:
(YOU)

In parentheses.

No. 40: 1972

The Palais de la Défense, II

I am in the Palais de la Défense. Its enormous vault seems to be opening, then closing.

Later: I am still in the Palais de la Défense. There is no longer a vault, or, rather, the vault, the palace, are everywhere.

No. 41: January 1971

The chase in Dublin

An action movie in color; the color is very flat, a fawn-toned monochrome, very “Hollywood” (like Douglas Sirk’s *Captain Lightfoot* or Raoul Walsh’s *The World in His* Arms).

It takes place in Dublin, in the XIXth century.

The single central character, whom I am shadowing, is a revolutionary chief who has either been handed over to the police or, rather, been sentenced to death by his former comrades.

He knows it.

He is walking with a small dog and he knows that as soon as two dogs come to track him it will be the signal for the assassins to show themselves.

He does not try to escape what is clearly inevitable; on the contrary, he keeps walking, shows his face all over town, goes into pubs, etc. People turn away from him, or look at him with hatred, spite or pity. But no dog will even come close to his dog.

But suddenly, at one point, the dog escapes her master and runs off.

Hasty run to catch her. For he is willing to die, but he does not want to know when and by whose hand.

Crossing courtyards

Scaling walls

Climbing stairs

Very upsetting: everything and everyone become threatening.

There are at least two shots of the same circular path (actually, the scene always goes in a circle and we end up where we began — like in an engraving by that Swiss artist whose name escapes me (Escher) or, rather, like being on a gigantic Mōbius strip.

There could be scenes with a bit of a “Pepe le Moko” feel to them.

At one point, a bit distressed, I try to “make the image go faster” (to watch myself run up the stairs faster) but I can’t.

No. 42: January 1971

Making the meal

Z. is throwing a party for a friend. On the other side of a small partition, we — i.e., me supervising a crowd of kitchen hands — are making dinner. We're in high spirits, we're singing. I'm making some kind of cream, mayonnaise or flan, using lots of ingredients out of boxes: how easy this is! How appetizing!

But — maybe later, at the end — a small animal comes and eats from the plate.

I'm very cheerful. I am the fool, the favored entertainer.

No. 43: January 1971

Apartment

Henri G.'s apartment. Interconnected rooms in "quincunx formation."

In each room, stereo equipment: tape recorders, radios, stereos, and more, and more, ever more perfect.

No. 44: January 1971

High fidelity

I am walking with P. across the “high fidelity” section of a department store. Maybe one of the appliances has a particularly remarkable shape?

No. 45: January 1971

The tank

P. and one of her friends and I have moved into an abandoned house. Though I recall having recently drunk water from the tap, we are told to use only mineral water, even to cook our food. But the bottle of water we find doesn't even have a cap.

We sit down to eat. Under the table we find (a bit like a chewed and abandoned piece of gum) a bit of pâté. Though it is likely several days old, it doesn't seem rotten in the slightest, but P. throws it out in disgust.

Out of the high, narrow window, I notice an immense tank. It's actually a cliff, but it has the unmistakable look of a tank: large metallic plates covered with layers of varnish or paint that are chipping off in patches or coming loose from their base, like huge blisters. The whole thing looks muddy, dirty and slippery.

Soon I make out, moving from left to right, a small boy running on the upper tracks of the tank, which is really the length of a path carved into the face of the cliff. A man is chasing him. Another man pops up and blocks his passage. The child's only chance of escape is to jump, but it's truly a jump into the wide open and his life is at stake. It seems clear that he's hesitant to dive, but at the last minute he loses his balance and jumps, like a child who is pushed into a pool and decides to make a dive of it once he realizes he's going to fall into the water anyway.

At the very bottom of the cliff-tank is a lake that I can see from the window. P. and her friend are now on the opposite shore.

The child falls into the lake, feet first, but it's as though he had jumped from only a few centimeters. There is very little water. The child keeps running toward the center of the lake, then, losing his footing, begins to swim. The two men swim after him. They are obviously cops and a police boat sets off from the bank and blocks the child's path. He dives down and emerges a bit farther off, but this time he's completely surrounded. Then a new person pops up: a man with a beard and maybe a pistol. He is threatening the police, not to kill them but to kill himself if they don't let the child go. They do.

I catch up with P. on the bank. We recount indignantly what we have just seen, like a scandalous and revealing news story.

No. 46: January 1971

Concentration camp in the snow

or

Winter sports in the camp

Only a single image remains: that of someone with shoes made of very hard snow, or ice, irresistibly suggesting the idea of a hockey puck.

No. 47: February 1971

The Chinese restaurant

I am with Henri G. at a very expensive Chinese restaurant.

We've been discussing something in the news, no doubt a scuffle between some kids.

Now we see them, the kids, on television. They're up on a pedestal, in military dress and performing various mass gymnastics.

No. 48: February 1971

The battery-operated alarm clock

1

I am at a bar with a fairly famous Italian actress. Though she is over fifty, she is a remarkably pretty woman, still in excellent shape. She is imagining without rejecting — on the contrary, with satisfaction — the notion of becoming my mistress. But the clock strikes six and she abruptly gets up and leaves.

2

P. has given me a battery-operated alarm clock; it is spherical and transparent, and has several little suction pads and two oblong pieces attached laterally on each side whose function is unclear. But Abdelkader Z. is playing with the pieces, losing them. The alarm clock is unusable. I am very angry.

3

Major railway strike. Red flags on the tracks block the trains. I walk along the rails, suitcase in hand. I enter a city, perhaps Grenoble. I cross an intersection where cops (all in plainclothes, looking almost friendly) are gathered. Before, I had pulled out of the ground one of the innumerable red flags that were planted there and covered my hand with it to carry my suitcase (a gesture I felt was in solidarity with the strikers).

I walk along the palisades. I get to a church. Actually, there are no walls, and the floor is made of macadam, like the street, but only a roof held up by pillars.

I look for the priest, who is not there, but I see him suddenly, hiding above his altar. He comes toward me and says:

“I want to be a father”

“But you cannot you are a priest”

He answers that it makes no difference.

Two herring merchants (the fat Marseillais sort) look at us.

4

The same scene but another setting.

I am at a friend's house (maybe H.'s). I am dismayed because I have to return to the army. I haven't finished my service yet. I calculate that I should be free again around February 15th. They could let it slide, since it's not worth making me come back for so little time, especially since I'll have to jump (with a parachute) the following day and all the requisite medical visits will take a long time.

My companions explain to me that they're going to leave town and go back to Paris, and I won't see them again.

Maybe the battery-operated alarm clock makes another appearance here.

No. 49: February 1971

M/W

In a book I'm translating, I find two phrases: the first ends with "wrecking their neck," the second with "making their naked," a slang expression that means "to strip naked."

No. 50: February 1971

The intruder

Someone has managed to enter my home through the thin shower partition. He knocks and calls out to me. There's nothing hostile in his voice, in any case. It's a woman, I suppose; I smell her at the foot of my bed, she is whispering something in my ear; I am absolutely convinced I'm not dreaming; I wake with a start, a bit panicked, hearing myself say:

"What is it?"

(a few moments later, someone rings at the door. It's C., who has come to have breakfast with me and has brought croissants)

No. 51: February 1971

The big courtyard

A courtyard, a huge space surrounded by houses. I run into Henri C., who tells me he's going down to Grenoble too and can take me.

We all have dinner together. I move from table to table. There is nothing to eat except cheese, and in almost all cases the cheese looks fine but turns out to be crawling with worms. I tell P. about this, and she says she knew about it, having gone back up to her place. But she makes me a tart anyway, checking (by opening it all around) that the piece she's giving me is wormless.

Several times I get up to leave. I kiss everyone (several girls on the mouth). Z. is there, staying a bit off to the side, but smiling. Except for a girl who is crying and refuses to let me kiss her (though she relents later) everyone is relaxed (even though I'm leaving?). The hugs and kisses goodbye restart several times. Henri C. and his wife are taking the plane from Grenoble to Paris and I the train. He reiterates his offer to drive me. I accept, asking that we leave right away, since I like to get my seat on the train fifteen minutes before it leaves. Henri C. answers that we still have time for a cup of coffee (it's foul but it's hot). Coffee is served in one of the buildings in the courtyard, the only one with lights on. There are three steps leading up to it. Smoke-filled room, poor people eating, a counter in back. They bring us our coffee outside (we're crouched on the ground) on a large tray. There are only three large mugs — one black, two very white — and a teacup. I take a sip of black coffee, which was not meant for me (but nothing was meant for me).

Henri C. is very elegant, very youthful; he is wearing a soft black hat, which I tell him looks terrific on him.

No. 52: February 1971

Seaside

'Twas a story replete with twists and turns. It took place near Nice, by the sea. Maybe Menton. Alain Delon was involved, or a friend of Alain Delon. I had dinner in a restaurant whose owner knew my uncle. Later, I wanted to go back there; I called, but ultimately I didn't make a reservation. My uncle, rather dryly as I recall, scolded me; for what I'm not sure, maybe for not telling him about it.

I returned to Paris in a magnificent machine, ultramodern and very sci-fi. I remember panoramic portholes. Dizzying speed.

No. 53: February 1971

The Renshaw
Exchanges

Pillars for 4
common word I forget
Ren-Shaw

(Shaw-Ren)

Inhibition

(I scratched these words out in the night; I find them in the morning; none of them evokes any particular memory)

(recurring Renshaw inhibition is, to put it crudely, a loop system controlling muscular contraction)

No. 54: February 1971

The masters thesis

It might have been at Jean Duvignaud's, or maybe at Paul Virilio's.

I notice a mimeographed work on the table and open it. It's a masters thesis — devoted to stage design, it seems — written by A. while she was in South America. I hadn't heard about it, but I am at once surprised and pleased that she did something during her long stay.

There is a particular detail: the title page was composed by (and here some sort of famous name) on an IBM 307 (let's say).

I remember, on that note, that Pierre G. had once spoken to me of automatic composition.

This might take place at a cocktail party where things like this make for good conversation.

No. 55: March 1971

The support polygon

I am on the street with P. and Henri G. There are buses.

We're talking about the elephant's support polygon.

Henri G. reminds me that the center of gravity is located slightly toward the front (or slightly toward the back?) of the body; no effort is required to be upright, or only a tiny effort.

This explanation obviously applies to high heels.

No. 56: March 1971

Sperm and theater

(at some point during the morning I remember that I had a dream, from which only the two following words surface: Sperm, theater).

No. 57: March 1971

The return

Since I left her, Z. has been living with two men whom she does not love but who are incredibly rich; one is an engineer and the other some sort of Maharajah who has engaged him to build a fabulous house.

I watch as the house is built.

I arrive at the bottom of a high white wall; it's run through, fairly high overhead, with a large opening (future window or bay window) at the edge of which are two tilers, a man and a woman. I think I know them; in any case, they know me, because the woman asks me whether the third printing of *Things* has come out, then thanks me for having written that book, then tells me that, while we're at it, there ought to be a translation for people who stutter. This idea amuses me greatly.

Meanwhile, with great difficulty, I've managed to climb up to the opening with the help of (in the absence of a ladder) a rather thin but extremely sturdy wooden frame, and with a painful maneuver I stand myself up at the edge of the room where the tilers are working. Though it's forbidden to walk on freshly laid tiling (you move on little bridges made from planks and bricks), the tilers give me permission to enter the house. The tiling, which at first I think is the same as in the little house in Filagne, which is to say quadrangular, is hex- or octagonal; and the tiles vary in size, from minuscule to enormous, and the tilers' very art consists in resolving the delicate (and impossible) topological problems created by this disparity.

I move forward — reciting to myself, laughing, the first few sentences of *Things* while stuttering — sinking imperceptibly (but with a very distinct sensation) into the fresh cement. Some tiles are elevated above others; at first I think they're meant to be walked on, or that they're accidents; then I understand that they're decorative elements, like floating islands, like the rocks emerging from the sand of Zen gardens.

Memories of my life with the Maharajah begin to blur: I was the personal valet of the Maharajah, his right-hand man. I carried his briefcase and spent my time organizing it even though it contained nothing of importance. We had to leave for an official trip; the departure was scheduled for a certain time, but the Maharajah kept everyone hopelessly waiting. The Maharajah is a capricious man: he is never ready, he no longer wants to go, etc. I spend my time coming and going between my room and his apartments, and explaining his

whims in nearly Racinian terms to a confidant. Once I went to beg him to go, not for my sake but for that of the soldiers in his escort, knights with chain-mail coats, one of whom stood trembling right before me. Furious, the Maharajah threw his glass of vodka in my face (or, more precisely, over my head, like in a baptismal aspersion), then shattered the glass while cursing at me. This didn't bother me that much; what frustrated me most was that, all the way down the long hallway leading back to my room, the soldier whom I wanted so badly to help, and his wife (who was none other than P.), wouldn't stop making fun of me.

Another time, on the other hand, the Maharajah awarded me a decoration. It was a rectangular silver plaque, roughly the size of a 10-franc bill, very complexly corrugated: you could imagine it divided into, say, twelve squares, alternately hollow and embossed; each hollow and each embossing divided in turn into twelve hollows and embossments, and so on …

Ultimately, the Maharajah's hesitations had no consequence whatsoever. I thought it was six o'clock and that the departure had been irremediably compromised, but according to the big clock in my room it was only one p.m. Moreover, even later, I was in line at the métro station and it was only eleven a.m.

The line at the métro station was either to not buy a ticket or to buy a ticket out of the métro. Everyone found this grotesque, in any case. We could see, down below in the distance, train cars. On the left, at the bottom of a small iron staircase, were three doors; on the first nothing was written; on the second, something like CHORISTS' ENTRANCE; on the third KITCHENS. My confidant told me, or rather reminded me (I had been informed shortly before) that the RATP served affordable meals, even free for those unable to pay, but in the latter case they served only a cheaper plate of just cold meat, and I concluded from this that no hot meals were available there.

Back to Z.'s house.

"Strange," I tell myself, "usually she covers her floors uniformly, with stones or with a carpet; here she's chosen an altogether different approach, doubtless under the influence of the Maharajah and his architects; true, she has a great deal of means at her disposal, whence these differently sized tiles, these large rocks emerging from the stones, this marvelous parquet of blond wood and the intricate pattern …"

Her room is a veritable sea of blue carpet. All the rooms where she normally lives have been reconstructed faithfully. I'm certain I will find my old room (haven't I come to take a book — a man asleep

— from my library?).

At the end of the corridor, I open a door and find two men, very tall, dressed in business clothes; they seem nervous to see me, almost afraid, and flee out the other side.

Another door. I am in a sort of dressing room. Z. appears, her back to me; she is naked; in passing she grabs a red bathrobe and disappears through a side door.

/ /

I tell Z. I've come to find a book. Where is my old library? She tells me it's in her son's place. I go to see her son; he is seated at his work table.

"How's it going?"

"Fine!"

I don't see my library, but I'm not even thinking about it anymore.

Walking in front of the two men, Z. and I prepare to leave the house. We are crossing the patio. It's a very long room (the one I watched being built) whose sides are taken up by terraces and in which you move around on thin stone paths, on top of narrow canals filled with water. Lots of flowers. Tables with lots of people. Party ambiance. Hullabaloo. I hear things like

"Your party is, was a smashing success,"

then, more distinctly,

"Champagne and Perrier."

Z. says a few words in English.

We go down rue Soufflot. We are walking, Z. and I, fairly far ahead of the two men. Z. can't stop laughing:

"I was so sure you'd come, I didn't even need to wait for you. You see, this morning nothing, the telephone didn't even ring, and here you are!"

She seems perfectly reassured, ironic and mean. I realize I have no cigarettes with me. I spot a little tobacco shop on the right. I run over (across the street, I think). It's a tiny room where they sell mostly haberdashery. There is a partially screened counter. Some young girls all dressed in red are crowded in front of the counter, no doubt schoolgirls or boarders. On the other side of the counter are two young women dressed the same way, and a few more schoolgirls.

I get impatient.

"I'd like filtered Gitanes and a box of matches."

"We don't have filtered Gitanes."

I'm preparing to ask for different cigarettes when I see, on a shelf to the right, a whole bundle of random, unsorted packs of cigarettes, among them a pack of filtered Gitanes. I point to it. They give it to me. I pay and leave.

I look for Z., but she has disappeared along with the two men. A moment of despair, followed by an almost reassuring feeling of irrevocability. My error in seeing her again wasn't so great, then, because now she's disappeared once more. As is my habit, I tear off the translucent paper covering my pack of cigarettes. I then realize with anger that I've been sold not a pack of cigarettes but a large box of matches.

I walk down boulevard Saint-Michel on the right-hand sidewalk. It's Friday. Though it's only 4 p.m. it is dark, or almost dark. I decide to call M., though I am convinced it will be useless. I go into a tobacco shop. I wait in front of the register. The customer in front of me leaves holding a newspaper that had been covering half of the newsman's counter. I find a five-centime piece, go to put it in my pocket, and instead give it to the newsman (an old man), who commends me for my honesty. I give him a ten-franc bill and ask for a pack of filtered Gitanes and a box of matches, or 2.10 francs. But he makes several mistakes while trying to give me my change.

Ultimately, I have to do as follows:

ask him for a pack of cigarettes, or 2 francs, with a 10-franc bill. He'll give me 8 back;

give him a 1-franc coin and ask for a box of matches, or 10 centimes, so that he gives me back 90 centimes.

But it's not even clear that this transaction will work.

No. 58: March 1971 (in the morning following the night of dream no. 57)

Snow
(… no doubt I finally called
M. who told me to come get her)

I find her almost in front of her building. She's smiling. We begin walking arm in arm. She's wearing a white jacket with four pockets and I only a T-shirt. I realize I have only 20, or 40, or 60 francs in my pocket, though we're planning to have dinner at Balzar; but I tell myself it's okay because I can always tell the maître d' that I'll come back and pay the next day; a bit later, I realize it's even easier for us to go to a bar where I settle my tab monthly.

Though I'm not expecting anything in particular from this evening, thinking I'm still indifferent to M., I realize bit by bit that M. loves me. At one point, we kiss. For an instant I am flooded with joy, but soon some concerns surface. First of all, M. seems much taller than usual, almost too tall for me; I have to stand on tiptoe and crane my neck up to see her face! Also, her hair isn't done as it usually is; half of it is blown up in front with large swooping waves. Her eyes are not exactly her eyes, but they're still pretty eyes.

We resume walking. She hooks her left arm around my waist and, laughing, caresses my navel and fly with her long fingers. She presses against me. I harden at the contact with her stomach, my hands gliding along her smooth back.

We keep walking. She tells me she sent her children to boarding school; she tried to kill herself but she doesn't tell me how. Now she lives at Hôtel Degotex.

"If you could see my room!" she tells me, laughing.

I tell her that she will come live with me and that she'll be perfectly happy there.

A girlfriend of hers joins us. We arrive in the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève neighborhood. We climb up a narrow, sinuous street. Soon the pavement is replaced with thick, close-cropped grass. Two *passenger* cars pass us. In one there is a mourning woman, in a state of

complete prostration.

Soon it becomes a snowy path, less and less passable. Lots of people are getting worn out climbing up the sides. We make painstaking progress. I see that my grey sock has a hole in the toe, then it's just a bit worn, then it's covered with its shoe (it's a Church Bros. shoe). I was also surprised to be wearing only socks.

At the very end, a little ice cliff that's very difficult to climb. You have to plant an ice axe in the ice, well above your head, balance on it (execute a difficult pull-up), balance on the axe before you can try to touch the top of the cliff with your fingertips and make it up there with another pull-up.

But before even getting that far, you have to climb a rather steep still hill heap. M. goes for it. I want to follow her but I can't. All of my will (and it's the only thing I want to do at this moment) is useless; my muscles are like cotton.

M.'s friend signals to us to come down; a bit farther on is a road that goes straight off, with no snow on it.

We are somewhere near Lans.

Did we cross a mountain pass?

It seems to me that this road and the path we're coming from are part of the same valley.

This vaguely frustrating situation seems to be written on a chalkboard that someone is carrying by and which says something like

There are not two passes
They meet
There is only one pass
There is no pass
There is nothing

No. 59: March 1971

The avenger
/ /

/ /

After a long absence, the Avenger returns to Mexico. A traitor is about to shoot him in the back when a gloved hand rises up and stops him.

Long horseback rides to protect watering holes and secret sources.

In town, riots break out. The gates of the grand plaza have been torn off, the posters torn down.

The country is dominated by a petty tyrant, a servant of Yankee imperialism.

Many twists and turns, which become gags in the style of *Lucky Luke*.

/ /

No. 60: March 1971

Bread liberation
A “Brechtian” musical comedy.

1

We are marines. We are shipping off to war. There is great confusion in the passageway. Nobody knows exactly which room to take.

2

We have set sail.

The liner, viewed from above: majestic. It's understood this war is going to be something terrible; it seems as though a bomb is going to fall right on the liner.

The liner is full of oblong compartments (not unlike coffins) arranged in long parallel rows, some of which have lids that clack shut (when the "coffin" is empty) while others stay stubbornly closed. It's like a Busby Berkeley ballet, or like the bank of mussels Alphonse Allais taught to play the castanets. Soon it's clear that these are crew cabins, then that it's the bread, which is sealed (vacuum-packed under a nylon sheath).

3

GREAT CAMPAIGN FOR THE LIBERATION OF BREAD

With a friend (H.M.) I'm performing a duet dance number, very Astaire-Kelly, while singing:

Don't shut away the bread
The bread must be free (ad. lib.)

We persuade various trade associations, who are seen for just a moment in intensely colored close-ups in the film. Thus, a "mustachioed General Boulanger."

4

Large demonstration.

My friend (or is it me?) takes a microphone that has dropped down from the sky and shouts:

“In a few seconds, under the direction of [stumbles through a comically overlong name], the Marine Orchestra will perform the Bread Liberation.”

Music. The musicians are far above us. We’re on the quay and they’re on the liner.

5

I find a friend (or it's still H.M.). He shows me his new wife (he used to have an enormous wife, like an Italian matriarch): a slender woman in a long coat.

I insist on going to their house, but he begins to embrace and caress his wife and soon I find myself caressing her too and, finally, naked on top of her and, though she crossed her legs at first, planted strong and deep inside of her.

No. 61: March 1971

Rougeot

Moved by a sort of premonition — one entirely vindicated by what would happen — I arranged for C.T. not to stay and made a "backup meeting" with P. at the Rougeot restaurant near Montparnasse.

At Rougeot, I find P. with F. I am furious.

P. says to me only:
"Indeed, Rougeot really is quite good."

No. 62: March 1971 (Sarrebruck)

Dream B.

One of the singers I am to meet tomorrow is a granddaughter of Miss B.

This surprises me at first — Miss B. is not married and has no children — until I remember having met, long ago, in Switzerland, a young Yugoslavian couple of which the man was also a grandchild in the B. family.

I can’t even believe this memory had never come back to me.

No. 63: March 1971 (Sarrebruck)

Urban Western

(Revenge. Each side counts its dead. Sniper rifle. On the train. Passing through customs. Flowers in their vases. (Pseudo-)leftist pamphlets)

At the end, I'm supposed to go with the customs agent to see his manager. He tells me to wait in the dining car. It seems empty at first, but all of the tables are taken. The bar stools are free, but some children playing in front of the bar have put their lottery cards on them.

I look out the window. A soft hill. This is the exact spot where, last year, the Vigilante launched his attack on us.

The train begins again. I look at a map. We have just left Buda, we are crossing a bridge, a long island, another bridge, before stopping again in Pest where, I hope, I will find the solution.

No. 64: March 1971

Bone

It must be P. who, while stroking my head, which is bald — my hair is only a sort of wig or mask — notices that my “frontal” bone (that is, a bone that covers the top of the skull like the cover of a soup tureen, but flatter, barely rounded) is moving.

This frightens me at first.

Mind the fontanels, which might not be fully bound yet even after so long!

Then I check for myself. Passing my thumbnails along the edge of the bone, I barely need to apply pressure for the bone (like the case of my alarm clock or the battery cover on my radio) to come loose and go rolling around on the floor.

I can see my cortex.

I pick up my bone and put it back in place. I begin to worry again, more and more, about the chance of infection.

Later, I dare to move my head and my bone does not fall, which is reassuring.

I’m glad to know it’s just a dream.

/ /

I am in Dampierre, in my old room. There are spider webs everywhere.

I begin to suit up to leave on motorcycle. I pick up my shoes. They’re full of spider webs and tiny droppings, like little grains of wheat or lentils. On the sole is a large spider, which I eventually crush.

No. 65: April 1971

Planks

1

Dampierre. I go into the bathroom on the second floor. It's a little room where you can see without being seen. I think I see C. but it's a little girl in a red dress.

2

There are three of us. We're stealing various things, then two planks of wood from an empty storefront next to the department store near Ledru-Rollin.

Nobody is watching us, but I ask a nearby artisan whether we can. Even though he didn't want anything from me! Obviously, he answers that it doesn't matter for one plank, but he's not allowed to give up the other. We return both to him.

I am with J.L. in a narrow alley — it looks a bit like the passage Choiseul — near the Bastille.

There is a "New Order" demonstration, with parachutists.

At the end of the alley, a small door with a gate. The lock is not in the middle of the gate but at the very top.

We have to return to this narrow alley to pick up the packets J.L. and I left there.

I run into my boss; he introduces me to several American friends whose names I already know (they turn up frequently in my file).

We watch a baseball game.

We realize that cops are gathering behind the players.

Back in the alley. Suddenly I'm afraid. No doubt we should run, but there are too many — decidedly too many, far too many bags.

No. 66: April 1971

The triangle

During a meal, we are exchanging good crossword clues, particularly a film title.

J.L. takes me aside to give me a word of advice: I should stop working at the laboratory; I should get up at noon, go to the movies each day from 2 to 4, and make my crossword puzzles afterwards.

"But I can't make a living off my crossword puzzles," I tell him.

Yes I can, he tells me, I'll be able to place them and everything; I just have to spend two hours, not three days, on each.

A bit later, J.L. puts a record on the turntable: it's barely modern music, more like modern music aping its classical influences. Everyone says it's lovely.

"These are," says J.L., " 'Musical recommendations to the Radio Luxembourg Orchestra,' by Lolita von Paraboom." Someone makes a crack about the fact that it's a "commissioned work"; someone specifies that it's from 1968 or 1969.

There are three of us in the room. J.L. on the stairs in the back, near the record player; me standing near a long wooden table, and a stranger (male or female?) who is equidistant from me and from J.L. We trace between the three of us a right triangle whose long side is J/me, whose short side is J/the stranger (m/f), and the hypotenuse the stranger (m/f) and me …

No. 67: May 1971

The stolen letter

I think I have woken up. There are lots of maids in my room. But is it really my room?

I'm by a body of water. To cross it, I take a footbridge that becomes a suspension bridge over the Seine. At the middle I see the date 1953.

Someone has stolen the letter I had in my pocket.

I am running a sprint with a black woman.

No. 68: May 1971

I-words

There seem to be — really? — three words in my file that begin with the letter I:

Impedance
Inhibition
I?

Wasn't there something else before? At the theater? Three sketches?

No. 69: May 1971

Othon

Jean-Marie Straub's film, Othon, inspired by the Corneille play, has a different name.

Maybe it's the Corneille play that has a different name?

Actually, there's another text too, hidden beneath the first, which I try in vain to decipher.

No. 70: May 1971

The two-way switch
I agree to take in a cat.
Who is this cat? (complicated genealogy…)
Where will he relieve himself?

On the street major public works are being done; they're installing a two-way switch system for cars.

Actually, it's only a question of cuts to make to a text (A man asleep?)

No. 71: May 1971

The bus

… first there's the frightfully complicated consultation of a restaurant menu, which ends with going up and down staircases, perhaps in pursuit of indifferent maîtres d'. All we want to know is how long this or that dish will take to prepare.

It seems the waiting times are so long that we have time to go play a game of Go somewhere fairly far out of town.

We get on a bus.

I'm sitting in the middle of the bus, on the left side. Jacques R., his wife and his daughter are in front, on the right, near the door.

At the back of the bus (so I can see only if I turn around) is a sort of display stand, which I find at once elegant, practical, and banal; by banal I mean that someone should have thought of it long ago.

At one point the bus stops and Jacques R. gets off. We seem to be right by Notre-Dame de Lorette, where he lives. His wife is no longer there. But someone makes a comment to the effect of:

"Why is he getting off when his wife is here?" to which someone else replies:

"No, idiot, that's his daughter."

Anyway, the bus leaves. It has become a passenger car. At the wheel is Pierre L. or Jean-Pierre P. It quickly becomes clear that they're driving very badly; for starters, they go the wrong way down a one-way street.

I am in another car next to the (unidentified) driver and we're increasingly sure that they're going to get in an accident.

Indeed, a bit later, on a large and busy road, there is a spectacular pileup, though it proves soon enough to have caused more noise than harm.

The two drivers of the crashed vehicles are circling each other in a slow ballet. Pierre L. (or Jean-Pierre P.) has a crank in his hand; the other driver holds a brick. They rush at each other, stop, Pierre L. leaves, then suddenly turns around and mimes hitting the other driver.

Oil flows from the car

A large puddle collects by the side of the road and grows to the size of a river where washerwomen come to beat their clothes.

No. 72: May 1971

The carnival

With a young woman who works in the same laboratory as me, I'm getting ready to take a bus to go home.

The bus arrives. It's empty except for a single person at the back, who is Z. I board and, after thinking for a long time, I ask the conductor to give me a single ticket and I pay with a one-franc coin.

I sit next to my colleague, facing Z. but fairly far from her. To all indications she hasn't seen me, but deep down I'm sure she has.

We are passed by some motorcyclists, then we come to a crazy carnival that seems to have been organized by high school students. There's a whole series of painted backdrops, trompe-l'œil, makeup, etc., made with a sort of liquid plastic matter; the colors are very bright: mauve, candy pink, red, etc. It's sold in pressurized tubes, so quite easy to use.

Various carnival scenes. Battle reenactment; an enormous shell falls awfully from a howitzer; a whole section of the street is heaved up, as though a gigantic mole were burrowing underneath it.

This now seems to be happening near rue de l'Assomption.

A young boy is lying in a pool of (fake) blood with a grimace of feigned agony; I look at him in passing, but without showing any emotion, and he seems disappointed that I didn't appreciate his performance (or that I didn't show my appreciation).

The road back is now the little road in Dampierre. There's a whole group of us. They're explaining how the plastic bombs work, insisting on how practical they are.

At the table in Dampierre. I'm across from Z. There is a ridiculously small cheese-plate. Z. explains how difficult it is to find good cheeses. Someone brings a slice of brie that needs to be cut, or, more precisely, whose rind needs to be removed. I try to do so with a long knife that I find next to me, but someone on my left (maybe S.B.) takes the plate from me and passes it to Z. I groan, saying something like

"I can't do anything right here."

I notice that I've made a tiny cut on my index finger; it seems covered in soot and I have to press down hard to see a drop of blood form.

P. sings

P. is singing.

She's singing remarkably well. The song is in a realist style, but very moving.

We walk together down rue des Boulangers. She's going to work and I want to go see my aunt on rue de l'Assomption. I suggest that we walk some of the way (it's nice out).

I ask how she managed to get a chorus to accompany her at the end of the song. She tells me it was done with a recording and tells me the name of the system — something like "video-tape"—she used.

She was singing on the street, and people were even turning around to listen to her, but she was still accompanied, as though on a record.

I'm pleased for her that she is singing. We plan her repertoire and her career. She will begin at Galerie 55, then at l'Écluse, etc. I'm certain I can help her, that her talent will win many people over. I dream that she's already a star.

We are slightly lost in a remote neighborhood.

We're walking down a staircase; I notice she's not wearing anything under her white cloth jacket and that she has a lovely chest.

The staircase is carved out of wood, very rococo. I descend it by sliding down the banister, thinking "in petto" that it must be childish to do such things at my age, but I'm also very happy to be doing it.

I arrive at the bottom; while trying to get off the banister, I notice that my head is stuck between the banister bars and, across from me, through the unpolished window of the lodge, I see the shadow of the security guard getting up.

I manage to free myself in time. I leave, but I feel the presence of the guard behind me, following me out of the building.

I turn left. I see P. in the distance. There are two signs in the street; on one, closer and toward the left, is written "Ollé" (or "Olla"); on the other, a bit farther off and to the right, is written "OPERA." We go that way. P. is waiting for me not far from a little girl sitting on a garden chair with a schoolbag in her hand. I head toward P., first

walking, then running faster and faster, remarking to myself, “I’m definitely giving the impression of a uniformly accelerating speed”; still, I feel spikes in my acceleration. When I arrive, I pretend to grab a comic book that P. is holding under her arm. She tells me that people do that often but I have to arrive slower, and suggests that I start again. I walk back to do so and notice then that the little girl sitting beside P. has blood (or strawberry jam) all over her mouth. I approach P. running slowly, but the book I take, which was a hardcover illustrated book (like Asterix or Lucky Luke) has become just a newspaper …

(interrupted by “FIP 514, it’s 10:30!”)

No. 74: June 1971

The Quest for California

I am with P. and someone else in California. We search for something — what? — for a long time, in vain.

Regardless of your mode of transport, you have to pay a tax to get out of a room in San Francisco.

Will I take an airplane? A train? A car?

There is a desert surrounding San Francisco. Beware of forest fires. For many years, people came by sea (Chinese).

At the top of a hill on the outskirts of town, there is a sort of advertising column with a switch and an electrical wire attached by a very crude splice. Anxiety: it would take almost nothing to set the whole brush on fire.

I take the train. After the long trip across the desert, I am to arrive in Lyons, then somewhere else (Bordeaux? Marseilles? Paris? Not far from Lyons, in any case).

I am alone in a bunk. It seems like we've just departed, but the train arrives in Lyons.

I call P., who is in the next compartment. She comes to join me, walking on the steps outside the wagon. Now we are 4 in my compartment: P., me, and two of her girlfriends. The three women undress simultaneously, lifting their blouses over their heads, and wind up on the bunk under the same sheet. They all still have their underwear on. For my part, I'm completely naked; I bunch my underwear and socks into a ball and slide it under a fold in the bed.

I make love to the three women, one after the other.

I notice then that I'm on some sort of wide pedestal and that everyone in the wagon can see us. Not far from us, four men are sitting around a table; they look a bit like gangsters.

Slowly, the train crosses the town of Coursons. I'm surprised: if we've passed Lyons, this can't be Coursons, and yet it is Coursons: P. recognizes it well, me less so, having been there only once. Then the light bulb goes off: it's Coursons in the Nièvre (and I add: "You don't know …"), not Coursons in the Yonne.

On a sloping street you can see a sign indicating: Paris (or Marseilles) 4 (a digit in the tens place); a bit later, the confusion (is it 40 … or 49) clears: it's 41.

No. 75: June 1971

The painters

In a huge empty apartment, no doubt Denis B.'s. Gisèle lived across from an even bigger apartment (wasn't it that big, the place on rue de l'Assomption?).

I'm sleeping on the bare floor, on a mattress with no frame. In the next room J.L., or R.K., is typing on my typewriter.

Are we mad at each other? I pretend to be asleep. They move about not far from me and eventually leave.

Maybe S.B. will show up a bit later and slide under the sheets next to me?

Very quickly, a crowd takes over the apartment.

Above all, four painters who, though the apartment seems rather clean (shiny lacquered walls), are beginning to repaint it.

They intend to "make something of it."

No. 76: July 1971

The renovation

I enter the courtyard of a building under renovation (just as mine is under renovation).

Everything is very white and very dusty.

There was an external elevator, which has been enlarged and moved.

There was a stone fountain, which has been moved to the other side. The pipes are still there, but the stones of the base and basin have been moved.

A whole section of the wall has been reduced to rubble: a newly installed metal ceiling beam runs across it (like in the old “Taride” building at Mabillon).

No. 77: July 1971

The vendor

I have killed my wife and cut her rather crudely into small pieces, which I have wrapped hastily in paper bundles. The whole of her fits in a cardboard box, which is still relatively easy to handle.

My only hope is for someone to make her into wine or alcohol. I go to the distillery. I walk without knocking into a room where there are three women in overalls. Two are sitting down, the third is standing near a waist-high double door (like a saloon door).

Either I address them with a wink, like we know one another, or I call out, flatly, something like:

"I have 50 kilos of quality meat!"

The young woman who was standing brings me into a tiny room, where she begins to examine my merchandise. My package has all the necessary labels, but the young woman claims that the firm I represent is not an approved client of her Company and that I'm going to have a hard time closing the deal.

As a sample, I take a series of small bottles from the package. This should be no more than a simple formality, but, to my great confusion, there are more and more bottles: red wine, white wine, rosé, all sorts of liquor, even a pitcher of water — tiny, but full and above all uncorked: you could dip a finger in without making it overflow, which strikes me as an indubitable experimental demonstration of osmosis or of capillarity.

All the demonstration proves useless: a man comes out from the office next door and tells me this will end badly for me if they don't find my name in their files.

No. 78: July 1971

The trip

I had learned long ago to jump from a certain height (for example from the top of a high beam). This time, I seem to be much higher, almost at the first story of the Eiffel Tower. Below I can clearly see the grass and sand grooves of a garden, and I'm convinced I'll die if I jump. But finally I learn that I don't have to jump from this height, just from a much lower beam, and for that matter not even jump from it, just cross it.

H.M. and I are on a boat from New York to Paris. This obviously takes much longer than flying, but it's much more pleasant.

We're going to show a film at a festival whose first half was in New York and whose second half is to be in Paris.

A fire breaks out in a cabin on the level below. H.M. and I rush down and save the passengers. We are the heroes of the day and the passengers honor us.

I return to my cabin. A steward is there. He makes me realize how pleasant it all is. He changes my towels and, seeing that I'm a little sweaty, dabs my face with a towel (one of the ones he's collected to change).

I go to H.M.'s cabin. I learn that we are on the festival jury. The jury is called "the helical complex" and consists of 4 jurors: H.M. and myself, and two farmers who are just this moment coming into the cabin; they are from Villard-de-Lans, which H.M. knows well; one of them is "Lulu," whom I know also (no doubt I was in school with him during the war), but the second is unknown to me even though his face looks familiar.

No. 79: July 1971 (Lans)

1

The actress, I

I am in New York at a gigantic coffee shop.

2

In Paris, a café terrace, enormous. There are lots of people, especially Algerians, with a vaguely menacing air.

3

I forget my satchel on the terrace; there are 2,500 francs in it. I go back to get it; obviously, nothing. I am genuinely devastated. My only hope is that I am dreaming (I wake up, relieved).

4

I'm visiting a female friend (nothing between us, just friends). The actress M.D. arrives. She is a tall woman, pretty and cheerful, with long blond hair; she is naked under a light dress.

I begin touching her, caressing her "absent-mindedly."

I wind up on top of her, fondling her bare breasts.

I make love to her.

No. 80: July 1971 (Lans)

The rehearsal

Rehearsals for my next play have begun. We're already on set. I am explaining to the director, Marcel Cuvelier, the importance of the 6th character, who is mute but who appears to be spared the fate to which the 5 others are bound.

I am a soldier in Grenoble. I take 8 days of vacation, to go to Lans or Villard. I call to explain that I'm sick: spots on my skin, pityriasis, or, rather, to make the case more extreme, psoriasis. A woman answers, kindly but neutral. She doesn't seem to think this is possible, but she agrees to "prepare my file" anyway.

After a long time pondering, I try to remember the tune and the words of a song I wrote in 1941.

No. 81: July 1971 (Lans)

1

The man with a dog

I am visiting one of my nieces and her boyfriend. I am concerned to learn that they only got an average of 80 on their exams, when they would have needed 100. My niece suddenly seems swollen, almost ugly. I tell myself the life she is leading with her boyfriend isn't working out.

2

I return home. I live in a large single room in the same house as my niece. Above me, in a third apartment, live either P. or F. and an Algerian friend. I go to see P.; I find F., accompanied by another Algerian and Henri C. The three men seem each as unfriendly as the next, even almost hostile.

3

Out of some unknown necessity, I move a meeting scheduled for that night to the following day (which will be July 30th) at 11 a.m.

4

Now I remember with a sort of panic that I made an appointment for July 29th with a psychoanalyst, Mr. Bezu, at 34 rue Daru. I call Mr. Bezu to cancel the appointment. I have a very complicated conversation with his secretary, because she doesn't want to give me another appointment, though I insist on asking for the appointment that would normally have followed this one anyway. After much hesitation, the secretary finally concedes and gives me an appointment for July 30th at 2 p.m. This seems surprising to me, since at first it seems to me that the 30th is a Sunday. But in fact it's a Saturday.

I call from a phone booth and by the end of the conversation I have stepped halfway out. When I go back in to hang up, I find an old, kindly-looking man who shows me how I could have made the call without paying: just strip the wires and place them on the contacts, squeezing them between thumb and forefinger.

5

I go to rue Daru: it's in a neighborhood that's being torn down. In fact, it's a large esplanade where all the remains of the quarter are on display. It's very white. Some details look like paintings by Niki de Saint Phalle, as though they were made of celluloid baby parts.

I look around the exhibit, followed a few paces behind by Henri C., who is carrying a dog in his arms. Henri seems more interested in what I'm doing than in the exhibit itself, but he doesn't say anything to me. While going down the stairs toward the exit, I steal something of minor importance (like a newel post): maybe I'm caught by Henri C., who begins to smile.

6

Sudden change of scenery. I'm home again and I'm invisible. A Jerry Lewis-type gag: a man disguised as a dog (only by looking in his eyes — shining, almost red — can you tell that it's not a dog) exits, pulling on his leash, forcing the man leading him to break into a trot. The real dog, sitting in an armchair, watches him leave, then gets up on his hind legs (like a cartoon animal) and begins miming a boxing match.

7

Another scene from another film; this time it's *Designing Woman* by Vincent Minnelli. Two gangsters are terrorizing — or rather intimidating — a man (no doubt F.) who owes them 4,000 francs. As they leave, one of the gangsters tries to knock over a pedestal with several fragile objects on it. I end up opening the door and chasing them away (they leave without a fight).

8

Now I live in an immense, sumptuous apartment. I walk through the rooms, followed by F., who is telling me about his problems. I scold him for seeming to always wind up in situations like these, almost intentionally.

I come to a room filled with people. All of them look at me in a friendly way. It's the family of a little boy I barely know, but who I know likes me a great deal. The little boy introduces me to his father and his aunts. The father asks what he can do for me. I take him on an escalator to a long, narrow room where a congress is in session. I explain that I would like to install a projection hall in this room and show him how I'm thinking of doing so. The father tells me it's a very good idea. We go back across the apartment. The little boy takes my hand. He tells me he has 1,000 dollars and wants to give them to me. I tell him I cannot accept them, that it can't be a gift but only, if he wants, a donation to the film I'm going to make. I expect the father to offer that much, maybe even more, but there seems to be no question

No. 82: July 1971 (Lans)

1

The three Ms

I am in the lobby of M.'s house. I knock on the glass — black — of the concierge's window to ask what floor M. lives on. The window comes up very slowly, as though automatically. Apparently there's nobody behind it. Two of M.'s friends arrive. One of them tells me M. is gone, which makes me very angry. She told me to come by! This isn't the first time she's stood me up, but this time I've had enough and I decide to leave her a short goodbye note. All I can find to write on is a very large sheet of paper, which forces me to write vertically, since the sheet is pressed up against one of the lobby walls. The short text I compose is particularly violent.

The problem now is to find the mailbox. One of M.'s friends explains that it's hidden in the lobby walls, and sometimes even in the pipes (which are in fact false pipes); they're huge and mask the real ones; in one a miniature theater has been installed.

While we continue to look for this troublesome box, a crowd takes over the lobby and the situation evolves.

2

I worked with Michel M. on a screenplay at his house. Then he went on vacation and left me his apartment. Many people (more distant acquaintances than actual friends) have come to stay there.

3

I spend a long while in a large café (la Coupole?).

4

I'm on the street. I need stamps and I don't have any money with me. My uncle passes by, at the wheel of his car. I stop him and ask him for money. He goes to get me some, then reconsiders and asks what I plan to do with it.

"It's to buy stamps."

"You don't have any at home?"

"I do."

"Go get them."

He smiles and starts his car again. (I can't say I'm surprised at him.)

5

So I go home, or rather to Michel M.'s. I've barely made it through the door when a young girl in white, whom I recognize as Michel's ex-girlfriend, comes to ask me for an explanation. She has just arrived with her fiancé and found the house full. I reassure her, send her to her room, and go to see the other occupants. I figure we'll be able to work something out, since the house is huge. The others are going to bed, even though it's broad daylight. There is in particular one girl who has put on a ridiculous and rather comical lace nightshirt with tiny buttons, which makes her look like a fragile doll or like a portrait of a child.

Everyone agrees to sleep during the day and go out at night. I declare myself satisfied and go to tell the fiancée — no, she is no longer the fiancée, she's Michel's ex-girlfriend. I cross several rooms and halls before arriving: indeed, this place is enormous.

I find Michel's ex-girlfriend, her fiancé, and another girl, fairly pretty and very cheerful, who is undressing; her chest, very pretty, is exposed; she is passing continually between a small paneled room ("dressing room") and another small room, maybe a bathroom. She tries to avoid my eyes, but it's a modest (and flirtatious) game rather than a real act of modesty. For my part, amused, I pretend not to look at her while I explain to Michel's ex-girlfriend that the apartment is large enough to accommodate everyone, provisionally.

6

I try to go back to the other part of the apartment. I wander the halls, and soon wind up in a neighborhood being torn down.

The sense I get is somewhat like the one you get upon seeing a façade barely transformed (or recognizable though profoundly transformed) after it's been covered for a long time by a wooden fence (like the "TARIDE" building at Mabillon): here, at last, is the final look that this house, this street, this neighborhood will have! How long we have waited! That's just what I thought it would look like! (like a statue being unveiled to inaugurate it).

7

There actually is an inauguration ceremony, not to place the first stone but to make the final blow (Tabula rasa). Without wanting to, I wind up alongside the procession, which passes me slowly until I begin walking faster to pass it. First there are a few cops, then a delegation of gentlemen in uniform (who are nonetheless plainclothes men) and finally a group of young men in uniform (some kind of athletic tracksuits), whom I think I recognize as reserve officers but who are in fact “ .” One of them comes up and specifies who they are: they live in groups of 30 in special houses (their name, followed by the designation “iary,” is what these houses are called) and they take 30-day oaths of chastity. I almost burst out laughing at the sound of this act of faith, but the young man looks at me with an amused smile too. I walk to the opposite sidewalk to rejoin my friends across the street.

8

I'm in a bar. There are two rooms, one large and one small, joined by a thin hallway where the proper bar (the counter) has been set up. I'm at the bar, perched on a stool. My friends are in the large room. Among them is Nour M. and, certainly, one of the girls from Michel's apartment.

I drink vodka at first, then whiskey.

I buy cigarettes. At one point I pay and there is a minor but quickly resolved problem in the accounts, something that's been paid for twice or something that hasn't been paid for. The girl leaves. I walk out with her; she gives me her address. I seem to understand that it's 5 rue Linné, or maybe on the street that runs along la Halle aux vins, where the Lutèce theater is, but it's another street, a parallel one, not the rue des Boulangers but a street bordering the Arènes de Lutèce.

I go to find Nour and suggest that we go to dinner. Two of his companions want to go to a "full show" (dinner, drinks, dancing, etc.) but I prefer to go somewhere quiet. We decide to all go to a restaurant I know near Denfert or Glacière.

No. 83: July 1971 (Lans)

1

The bank note

Vacation

L. is on vacation. We're staying at his place, in a dormitory, waiting for his return.

In the middle of the night I wake up and go into an adjoining room. I flip through the books and magazines on a table. / /. It's not impossible that that's when I happen upon the clipping from *L'Express*.

Someone comes in and asks for L. He's on vacation, I say. He looks at me carefully, tells me he thinks he believes me and asks if I'm not Z.'s boyfriend. I say (smiling "sadly") that I was.

There is light coming from L.'s office.

I go back to the common room. I sit down on a corner of the table. There are several open bottles, and I pour myself a glass of beer. It's not tepid; it's cold. I am totally demoralized. Someone, a young woman (M.F.), sweeps a bit in my corner, wipes the crumb-covered table, which comforts me somewhat.

/ /

2

Oedipus-Express

Home. R. comes in. He takes off his coat — it's a mariner's peacoat — and sighs that he's totally broke and needs me to support him. I tell him to make himself at home. He looks at B. who is walking around the apartment totally nude, as though indifferent to his attention. I go to my room, followed by Nourredine M. / / While talking to him I make a stack of wide — exceptionally wide—5-franc coins. I find several dozen of them. I exchange a dozen for a 50-franc bill (a bank note) (from whom? Maybe M.F.?). In the other room, I hear R. on the telephone. He comes in, laughing, to tell me he's on the line with an airplane in mid-flight. I think at first that it's D. on the plane and that he wants to speak to her (even though they've been separated for several years) but he clarifies that it's not, that it's the Express plane.

Several months before, "as a matter of fact," I found a paragraph in *L'Express* devoted to Oedipus — or, more precisely, to the figure of Oedipus — and decided to write an article using that clipping as a starting point. On one hand I immediately made it clear that it wasn't a real article about psychoanalysis, more of an "opinion by a contemporary author" on his own behalf. On the other hand, I found several pleasing titles, mostly puns I found very subtle and surprising that nobody had used before.

It seems it's quite complicated to have an article published in *L'Express*, or even elsewhere. I speak about this to a friend of François Maspero, who later tells me, or has someone tell me, that François Maspero is interested but that he wants to submit the article to a specialist (which I obviously find hilarious). Also, Marcel B., who seems to have a friend in a very high place (the king of Morocco) promises me his support: he is meeting with him very soon.

A whole "combination of circumstances" ensues around this article. It's like the old days of "La Ligne générale," a review I tried to found with a group of friends. This is how, while in line for a movie, I learn, again from Marcel B., that one of the former participants from La Ligne générale has become a critic under an assumed name and that he too can support my efforts. We remark that choosing a pseudonym is a sign of homosexuality and immediately come up with four examples, which form two almost-famous couples from Parisian Arts and Letters.

Inside the theater I noticed L. with a friend. We said hello

discreetly. He seemed to be eating an Eskimo Pie with a small spoon, but I understood right away that he was eating a hashish jam.

Finally, I have been taken on by *L'Express*. The director is none other than Jean Duvignaud and the secretary is Monique A.

Very soon there are the kind of squabbles that always erupt in such places.

From the window of Duvignaud's office, I notice a group of men on the street; they're hiding among parked cars. I smell a rat and go down to investigate. Except for one or two individuals, the group is made up of Englishmen who seem very irritated to see me. I ask to see what they're hiding. Two are hiding photos in their watch casings. But these photos — whose title had something seductive about it — are just thin slices of leather folded in two and show only vague gray stripes. The third is holding something in his hand: a map or a puzzle, but, though I'm very excited by what he shows me, I don't see anything of interest in it. Nonetheless, I'm sure the presence of these three Englishmen was what set off the whole affair.

I have a date with Monique A. to discuss just that. We're supposed to meet in a deserted snack bar in a covered passage (surely Passage Choiseul). Next door there is an Algerian café and, in front, three Algerian women holding each other by the waists. Next to them, the boss, their older brother, scolds them for their behavior, invoking the Ancestor. I remember that, in some sort of alternate story, Monique A. was not fired and the whole affair ended in catastrophe. It's in order to avoid such things happening again that she has quit this time, and we're meeting to talk about it.

Monique A. arrives. She stands behind the bar, I in front of it. She is genuinely dismayed. Why, we wonder, did she have to leave? She wasn't fired, but she had to leave. Why does this always happen at that damn company? Always bickering, people leaving, others staying, etc.

This seems related not so much to any particular newspaper stories as to life, in a much more general sense.

A gigantic snake creeps out from behind the counter and begins to swing above my head. First I tell myself I shouldn't pay it any mind, but it very quickly turns threatening and I am fascinated and frozen in fear. It swings closer and closer, whistling. I notice that its eyes are like projectors. The moment I feel all is totally lost, a gunshot, fired

from somewhere unknown by someone unknown, blasts and wakes me up.

No. 84: August 1971

The refusal to testify

I think I've found a large room in my apartment, but it turns out it's not mine, and, in fact, it's the street.

Lots of people show up and invade my room. They tell me that F. is in trouble: he shat in front of a public monument; I'm supposed to testify that I witnessed the scene and that I didn't see him do that, or even more precisely that I saw that he did not do it.

F. arrives, two cops flanking him. I explain or try to explain that I cannot testify to this.

I am in a play, but I'm also supposed to introduce the actor to some VIPs. Now, the mayor is senile. I manage to communicate through gestures that it's his tablemate who should speak: the real mayor keeps mum while the fake one delivers a very well imitated speech.

Later, I explain to Z. that it's not really important, that the fake was actually the former mayor, and, at the same time, the best friend and worst enemy of the real one.

We come to a place we've already seen: a high fence?

I make love to Z. Only inside her, all told, do I feel good.

No. 85: August 1971

Balls and masks

Passing by on the street, I stop to watch a tennis match and mix in with the players, who are apparently indistinguishable from the other passersby. At the end of a service, I catch a fairly difficult ball, earning the praise of one of the players (who is none other than Marcel C.). This sets off a chain of events: he thinks I know how to play; I don't dare disabuse him; he offers me the service.

Though the ball is terribly large and my racket ridiculously small, at first it doesn't go too badly. There is no net: the point is to send the ball over the fence in the park. I manage to send my first two balls to the other side and much farther than my opponent can reach (he doesn't even try), which gets us to 30-love. But the ball grows, finally looking like a slightly flat leather punching bag, and I can no longer get it over the fence. I think we've lost only one point, but my partner (Bernard L.) tells me sternly that we're trailing 50–40 and that if I don't catch up we will lose the service (just the service, which isn't so terrible: we'd be one game to one). I explain to him that I can't send such a heavy ball over with such a small racket and he offers to lend me one of his. Sure enough, under his arm he has two rackets that he's not using, which he has even put back in their presses (high wooden diamonds closed with four butterfly screws). These rackets are strange: they look like "old rackets" (like violas to violins, crumhorns to bassoons); one of them has an extremely large wooden frame and the racket itself (the stringed part) is a tiny round (not oval) hole that is obviously stringless. This is the one Bernard L. hands me; I tell him it has no strings and that I can't play with it. He begins to unscrew the press of the second racket, then thinks again and, almost angrily, gives me back the first one, insisting that it's perfectly strung. Sure enough, when I examine it closely I see that the hole is furnished with a fine network of gossamer threads.

First I try to serve by throwing the ball myself. But the ball and racket are much too heavy. My partners throw the ball while I hold the handle of the racket with two hands. I manage to hit the ball, but not hard enough: the ball falls short of the fence and the point is lost …

Another time, I played a game of chance and won an enormous amount of money (several thousands of new francs). The losers don't seem very happy but don't put up any particular fight to pay me. Nonetheless, just before I leave the gaming table, we begin to play

again and I lose a negligible sum, say 100 francs. This seems to mean: *We can make you win but we can also make you lose when we want and don't you forget it*.

I put the roll of bills in the breast pocket of my shirt. It sticks out a bit.

I live in the annex of a hotel. It serves as a prison as well. A group of prisoners (whose arrest, it seems to me now, I also witnessed) arrives. The henchmen are almost entirely shut up in these shiny metal shackles that bind them like clothes or masks. There is also a man whose neck is held in a leather and steel "platen," which is actually an instrument of torture. Besides this man, the henchmen are a wolfhound (also wrapped in irons) and a woman. The head of the gang is dressed in a habit.

The jailor's daughter shuts one of the prisoners in a room that's next to mine but a bit beneath it. I run into her as she's coming back up after double-locking the door. Our eyes meet and we smile at one another. I invite her to have a drink and she accepts eagerly.

We're on a fairly huge esplanade. We're looking for a bar. There is one, a very narrow one, all the way up (the next-to-last house on the plaza), but we find it ugly (or bad).

F. passes by. We shake hands. I tell him I was waiting for him to visit later. He reminds me that we were supposed to have dinner, and leaves.

The jailor's daughter is surprised by all the money sticking out of my breast pocket. I tell her that I played, that I won several thousand francs and that I am relieved of the financial troubles that had been dogging me for some time.

We wander through various streets. We remember that there is a pub at the end of rue de Boulainvilliers. I think, "in petto," that there should also be one on rue des Vignes, on the plaza of the "Ranelagh" cinema.

We go down the rue Raynouard. We're in a car and I'm driving. I'm not really driving: I have stopped the motor and the car is following the slope, which is also getting steeper and steeper. Far in front of us, there's a bicycle hurtling downhill alone and, farther still, a car that we recognize as belonging to Harry M. (but there's nobody

in it either).

The descent is increasingly dizzying, spectacular and intoxicating. There are huge bends and at some moments we fall nearly vertically. We're prodigiously excited. We slalom past all the other cars.

Of course, at the bottom, there is an impossible traffic jam — vehicles have fallen into the river by the hundreds and sailors are struggling to fish them out. People are walking on barge trains. We see our car sticking out of the water; it's a heap of dripping scrap metal (actually, no: it's not so much a heap; you can easily make out the form of a car, but it's an empty form, just the skeleton of the chassis).

We look for Harry M.'s car but don't find it. Decidedly, every time he is with me, Harry has bad luck with his cars — this is the second time this has happened to him.

We ask the sailors for insurance forms. They tell us that won't be necessary: our car and Harry M.'s will be paid for entirely, without any trouble, even if the remains are not found.

There is a very simple explanation for the easy reimbursement. The sailors don't give it to us but let us guess, saying: "In Grenoble and in Romans, they're only too happy to pay X francs for a trout."

Which means:

a) car accidents happen all the time on this river;

b) they wouldn't happen if not for the huge rocks in the middle of the river;

c) but they intentionally leave the huge rocks in the middle of the river so that the trout (and the trout fishers) come in droves …

No. 86: August 1971

Decorated with medals

I have been designated to participate in an international conference (in Ireland or in the Netherlands) on authors' rights. With C.B., director of the French delegation, I review the problem and talk about the other members of the commission, who are, for the most part, family members or friends of mine. Then there is a question of going, on our way back, to report on the conference to the President of the Republic. We recall, laughing, that we used to refuse to be part of the Presidential court. I ask C.B. if the President's nickname is still "Lulu." C.B. answers that he has no idea, but that "Lulu" is almost libelous.

With a (poorly identified) woman, J.L., and (a bit later) my aunt, I've been invited — or have dropped in without warning — to visit L. My aunt and J.L. have made it in, but the woman and I find ourselves on a little platform that turns out to be surrounded by a ditch filled with water. First we think there's no water, because it's covered in water lilies and lotuses, but there is, and lots of it. How to cross this ditch? It would be difficult to jump: in all probability we'd fall into the water before even taking off.

But here is a wooden bridge. The woman crosses it easily and lands in L.'s arms. He welcomes her, saying, "stay for dinner!" as though our impromptu visit hasn't put him out at all and he even knew we were staying. Then he reaches his hand out to me to help me cross the bridge; and it's good that he does, because the bridge is rotten and breaks the moment I step on it, but, thanks to his help, I do not fall into the water.

"O, precious symbolism!" I cry.

/ /

I discuss plans for the conference for a moment with J.L., and then with my aunt, who tells me she's not going, as she feels too tired; that same day she took a walk with her granddaughter and came back exhausted.

L. does not look like himself. He has a beard. He looks more like Bernard P. would if Bernard P. grew a beard. His wife looks vaguely like Bernard P.'s wife.

On a picnic table there are papers, a pair of glasses, and the book L. was reading when we arrived. It is a volume from the Pléiade, open

to a story entitled “Don B.,” or “Madame B.” Which reminds me of a Stendhal story.

No. 87: September 1971

Eight fragments, maybe from an opera

It seems I have gone to see Nicholas Ray's film *Johnny Guitar*.

I live in a house that I rent for 360 francs a year. The house is falling apart. The radiators are collapsing.

I send (surely to the landlord) a letter of apology, in which I pass the blame for the *degradation* of the house onto a second-class officer, while I myself am a reserve captain.

A colleague, M., comes to see me. G., another co-worker, also arrives; perhaps she is bothering us: in any case, our three-person scene gives me a great sense of displeasure.

We make several dates to meet; there are a great many of us. Departure for the procession: view of a big party. Wardrobe problem.

The opera (which I'm watching) looks nothing like it should. The stage is terribly far away.

The stage, this time very close: a large bald man, whose face conveys great tenderness, is smashing the skulls of the King, Queen, and Pope with a mace. Among the innumerable male and female extras is B.

I call Z. on the telephone.

No. 88: September 1971

Water town

In Philippe D.'s car. He is driving backwards; moreover, he's in the back seat.

His parents' accident.
(the old nanny and the matte silver chandelier)

He has just made a round trip, his hair has turned white.

This takes place in a (water) town where I am making a film with the actor Jean-Paul Belmondo. We call him on the phone. I send him a three-word message so that he understands who's asking. Another message, maybe.

In fact, the communiqué is meant for the actor's mistress, a very tan and callipygian woman whom I recognize, with shock, as P.L. (a man).

No. 89: September 1971

Crosswords

I'm talking to a friend about a project for the reissue of *Politique-Hebdo*. We meet two (or three) girls who used to work for the weekly and are preparing to go back there. In theory, there's no question of my setting crossword puzzles for them. I think about it nonetheless, "in petto"; I have a number of grids at the ready and no shortage of ideas for new ones. The only question to work out would be that of fees. I think of an excellent clue for "GRANT"—*his most famous children didn't take his name*. But no, silly, that's not "GRANT," that's obviously "VERNE." I find not a new definition for "GRANT" but another one for "VERNE": *A Jules who wasn't.*

No. 90: October 1971

My height

I'm supposed to write an item (like a *Who's Who* listing) about my boss.

To make my job easier, Jean Duvignaud gives me a "window notebook," a notebook whose hard cover has been cut out on the inside, a bit like for a passport.

The "window notebook" isn't about my boss but about L. This is how I learn that one of his middle names is Bertrand. Flipping through the notebook, I notice that the information it contains isn't up to date at all.

It's a window notebook, but it's not a current notebook.

I am at S.B.'s house. In a narrow and tortuous hall, she introduces me to her mother, mentioning my height (1.65m and a half). I correct her. I say first: 1.70m., then 1.68m. I feel desperately short.

Now there is a crowd in S.B.'s living room. Someone is telling — or maybe showing — the story of a young man who begins to levitate, earning the audience's admiration. But he ends up falling back to the ground (regardless of how gracefully he was floating) and he rushes under a train.

Earlier, I had had a long conversation with her father, and maybe also with her uncle. Both of them were abominably drunk.

No. 91: October 1971

1

25 blows with a stick

I am giving 25 blows with a stick. It's a performance, which Z. watches without understanding any of it.

For my part, what I understand is something like: from A to Z, where Z is the slash, the cut, the scar.

2

I am in Israel. The country has just gained independence. We wait for a long time in a hangar. Several trucks pass by.

There are two men in me. One is pro-Israel, the other anti-.
The anti- notices that it's not all for the worst in Israel.

No. 92: October 1971

The actress, 2

An actress begins to dance and slowly takes her clothes off. She has very small breasts.

I think of my mother.

No. 93: October 1971

The snowplow

I have a date with Z. at the Deux-Magots.

It's snowing.

The snow turns to ice.

Someone brings a snowplow. It emerges from the snow like a submarine's periscope emerging from the sea.

Details about how the snowplow works.

Another (is it really another?) snowplow flips over.

Z. pays seven and a half francs for our breakfast.

No. 94: October 1971

The inn

I visit J.L., who has just moved and now lives near the outskirts of Paris, across from a métro station. At first glance, the house seems to be just an ordinary building; it's next to an inn, whose sign says in Gothic letters:

VANVES INN

The apartment is actually a real three-story house (a triplex). The third floor is absolutely amazing. It's a living room with a grand piano; gradually you realize it's a very large room, a very, very large room: it goes on forever, its floor is a lawn that opens onto a horizon of wooded countryside.

The view is spectacular. We rave about it:

"What luck that you found this!"

"Too bad they'll eventually wise up and begin building housing projects on it!"

From the outside, the house looks like a property surrounded by high walls, *whose perspectives have been drawn such that no one could imagine an infinite space contained therein*.

I move in indefinitely, to this house where many other people also seem to live already.

One day, I meet a girl on the street. She asks if I can put her up for a while. I say yes, without specifying that there's nowhere for her to stay besides my room (which seems self-evident to me).

The house looks like Dampierre.

Each morning there is an assembly, like for a flag-raising ceremony.

From my window I see S.B. arriving in a car. She raises her eyes to me and smiles (but maybe there's something dangerous in her smile).

Later: I'm leaving P.'s and going home by way of rue des Écoles. It seems clear to me that I will meet up with a girlfriend who will spend the night.

I do run into many people I know, but they either don't see me at all, or too late …

No. 95: October 1971

The hypothalamus

It starts with a few harmless comments, but soon there's no denying it: there are several Es in *A Void*.

First one, then two, then twenty, then thousands!

I can't believe my eyes.

I discuss it with Claude.

You might think I'm dreaming.

Look again: no more Es.

Still!

But then again, yes, there's one, another, two more, and again, tons!

How did nobody ever notice?

Looking at neighbors through binoculars? One has the right to do so, so long as one respects special rules and confines one's observation to spatiotemporal sequences (as when one plays card games of patience).

I decide (still dreaming) to call this dream "the hypothalamus" because "thus is my desire structured." I should (in that case) have called it "the limbic system," which is a more pertinent term for all that refers to emotional behaviors.

No. 96: October 1971

The window
/ /

No. 97: November 1971

The navigators
The stairway

Fantasia

The photos

“You can see me when you want, but know that I don’t need you,” Z. tells me.

There are four of us. We’re coming back in a rowboat on the Seine. Soon it’s just me in the boat.

The river is filled with other navigators.

No. 98: November 1971

Rope

It's the end of an American comedy. Judy Garland is bewitching her seducer. She runs across the promenade that goes past the Gare du Trocadéro (recognizable by its zoo). It's 1900. The Eiffel Tower stands in the middle of a large meadow. Nonetheless, there's an elevator. It's a "shellevator"; its mechanism is slightly off, causing a small repetitive noise. I wouldn't want to go up in it. Fortunately, there's another elevator; it's a cabin, but I missed the first one.

I get on the second. It's like a funicular. I feel a friendly pressure on my hand.

At the top. There is an energetic old lady controlling the wire rope. Actually, it's not a rope that secures us but a very long wooden beam.

We run on the glacier.

Soccer players beneath us cheer for us when we pass by (they're villagers).

A. falls into my arms.

I see J. again. She's so happy with the English translation she did of her old friend D.'s play that she's started one in German with the help of a fat Sachs-Villatte dictionary. I'm pleased for her. She'll make maybe 2000 marks on the radio, I tell her; how much will she give D.? Just 2 or 300 marks, she replies.

No. 99: November 1971

Resistance

An apartment I almost lived in looks like an apartment Z. had. It's made up of one large living room and two duplex rooms.

But my apartment is square. I'm there with C. and Lise, and many others.

We're walking in the street, in the country, we're running.

It's during the Occupation. Germans everywhere. Sleepless night in a farm taken over by the underground. Scenes from the resistance.

Later, nothing but the evocation of these memories. There is an interviewer, like in *The Sorrow and the Pity*, which someone calls "The Sorrow and the Service," which, I don't know why, makes me think of a pun:

"What's the matter, Victor? You look lost!"

/ /

No. 100: December 1971

Finland

I finished my military service in a large citadel in the suburb of Malakoff. It was an immense fortress surrounded by an enormous network of roads.

On the way back from leave, I drive around it in a car. Here and there from the road you can see the huge towers of the fortress pop up, with innumerable concrete stairways leading up to it.

A change of posting brings me across the citadel to look for the health services office. It's on the twelfth floor of one of those towers. It takes me a long time to find the right one. I get into an elevator: it's a horizontal platform that slides at high speed along four dangerously slick walls. You have to avoid coming into contact with these walls (a vaguely upsetting feeling).

On the twelfth floor there is no health services office, but an immense drugstore, whose aisles are the size of streets. Thus I arrive at a sort of impasse. At the end is (maybe) health services (it's a hospital, or an infirmary, or maybe even a bank). On the right there's a small hotel, the "FINLAND" hotel, according to a neon sign out front.

I go into this "FINLAND" hotel and head for the bar. I notice right away that there is no Christmas tree. Deeply moved, almost in tears, I explain that there will be no Christmas party this year.

/ /

No. 101: January 1972

Disorder

All at once I realized there were damp stains on my living room carpet. Maybe it's the cat.

I pat and sniff: nothing. But there's a lot of it, everywhere.

I walked into my kitchen: it was an unbelievable mess.

It seems like a large section of the (blue) wall has come off, but it's only a plastic trash bag in a corner over the sink.

I decided to clean up and, first of all, to change.

I tried, with no luck, to get into a pair of brown corduroy pants that are obviously too small for me: they clearly belong to. and I'm surprised she didn't take them with her.

No. 102: January 1972

1

Towers

Near La Rochelle, where I've just spent a few days with a woman I didn't know very well. She is driving. She keeps getting lost, trying to get back to the large tower that stands in the center of town.

2

We can also see the tower on the horizon, straight up ahead. We go in that direction. The road is straight. We pass several statues and monuments: the statue of Liberty, large buildings with apartments like cells in a beehive. At last, I am seeing real examples of the contemporary architecture I'd only encountered in books! These are only housing projects, barely finished and already old …

3

We get to the station running very late.

We walk past the ticket window without paying. We get onto a train (where are our bags? what did we do with the car?)

There are no seats.

The train is packed.

Our itinerary, it seems, joins up directly with the métro, or with a circle railway. It seems like we're being negligent, that we should take advantage of such correspondences more often …

4

Crossing? Tunnel?

5

In Paris, we look for a taxi. We have to cross a vast esplanade where the fascist “New Order” movement has organized an automobile gymkhana.

Seems to me we’re not far from the Bois de Vincennes …

No. 103: January 1972

The tomb
Time: around Christmas
Place: around Paris

slipping and sliding on kilometers of stonework with big protruding pebbles (puddingstone)

the kit (for repairs): it contains a “cutter,” a pastry punch, a hammer, a suitcase handle missing its screws …

the pun is a bear to get my bearings: a glass of bear!

4

In the distance, the towers from last night's dream

5

We come to a town: Versailles.

6

Grotesque, police force, parade.

7

We are caught, in spite of ourselves, in the parade; it's led by a drum major, an old flabby Belgian clown (Valentin the Boneless).

8

Finally we get to the cemetery. Commotion.

I find myself in front of a tomb where distant relatives of one of us (there are three of us, with shifting identities) are laid.

I bend over the grave.

There are portraits encrusted in the stone; one is of a Eurasian woman whom I recognize as Madame Vidal-Naquet, a famous psychiatrist of her time.

I feel tears rising to my eyes, and soon I am weeping abundantly.

No. 104: February 1972

A dream by P.:

The third person

I am standing on a hotel balcony (overlooking the sea? the Seine? the road?). A couple comes up. The woman asks for the phone book; she specifies that it's white — maybe it's the most recent edition — and that, since she knows it, she'll have an easier time finding what she's looking for. A woman who was standing next to me (the hotel manager?) gives it to her: it's actually several unbound volumes that aren't white.

Later, a whole section of the same balcony is occupied by diners. I am at a table with several people. At the next table is the woman from earlier (it wasn't the hotel manager, just a guest like the others) with her husband: Mr. and Mrs. Cruel. Mrs. Cruel still has the phone book. I want to check something in it; I ask for the volume corresponding to the letter of the name in question, she seems to refuse; I explain to her what I want, and finally she gives it to me and I take it with a knowing look.

I flip through the "phone book," which turns out to be a sort of Cruel family album. The frontispiece for a chapter in the middle of the book is a photo of the Cruels' son. He is in the middle of a group of three: on the left, his father, who looks exactly like him, and who is a sort of cruel-looking Sami Frey, very brown, black eyes, thirty years old. The child must be about twelve; he seems kinder, blonder, his eyes are bluer. Suddenly I realize the photo is animated: the eyes are moving, the father's look is extremely mean and filled with rage, and the son's eyes are moving as well.

I am amazed by this effect. I turn the pages and I come to another animated photo: a corner of a room in which you see the corner of the bed and the curve of a large bowl decorated with characters, which I recognize as the Cruels' Roman bath. The child — he is eight — is crossing through the space toward a door on the left side, half open onto darkness, which I know is the bathroom (I'm surprised the Cruels don't use the Roman bath for the children, which seems perfectly suited to just that use).

Later, another dream.

Upon waking up, I remember the dream with the phone book and realize I do not know who the 3rd person in the first photo is — I don't think it was the mother.

No. 105: February 1972

The condemnation

At Jean Duvignaud's request, I set up a mailing list for people he wants to send offprint publications to.

P. and I are going away for the weekend to a fancy hotel, maybe the Ritz. We've booked two large apartments (or suites). We've brought so many bags (suitcases and hatboxes) that the busboys have to make two trips to bring everything up in the elevator.

In the elevator. It's a huge elevator, as big as a bedroom. We are preemptively happy, almost smug, about our luxurious weekend.

In P.'s room. A huge room, some of which is taken up by a bar. A reception is going full steam there. A small child is shoveling huge spoonfuls of *chili con carne* into his mouth.

I go down to the restaurant. P. is sitting at another table, looking very pretty. J.L. is sitting not far from me. At one point, he leads me to a corner of the room and begins talking to me about an imminent landing in Cuba. I interrupt: he's talking too much. The room is full of spies.

This is when an old woman, a witch, stands up, points at me, and shouts something like:

"We will be saved but he must die!"

At first I'm frightened, as though this threat is going to be realized on the spot, but then I comfort myself, convinced that it's an abstract threat, a metaphysical certainty not yet defined in time. However, I have been hoisted onto a sort of pedestal and people have begun worshipping me, which is to say licking my feet. I have barely become accustomed to this ritual when I realize they're actually trying to assassinate me by knocking me from the top of my pedestal. I end up falling, but I manage to hang on to the bumps on the wall (which is still dangerously slick) and I land uninjured on the floor. From way up high, people are bombarding me with enormous boulders, but none hits me.

I have fled into the high grass; I have met up with a horde and we have wandered for several years, several centuries, following animal tracks (maybe I knew how to find the passage about animals in the book?).

After long centuries of wandering, we come back to the regions we fled. On the steppe, a city has been built. It is called Texas. We see firearms for the first time …

Texas is a new city, made of wooden houses. Mostly saloons. The town hall, where a meeting is about to be held, is in a back room between two saloons. This arrangement is rather surprising at first, but you realize quickly that it's actually quite clever.

No. 106: February 1972

La Bibliothèque nationale

I'm working in the large reading room at the library. Alain G. comes and sits down at a table next to mine.

No. 107: February 1972

At the Kuntz restaurant

I am at the Kuntz restaurant. I call over an old man with white hair (a sort of maître d') and a young waiter who — blocking the passage of another, older waiter who has to go to miraculous lengths not to spill anything while serving the neighboring table — brings me a text that I finally identify as a pastiche of "la fabrique du pré" (not exactly a pastiche, nor a copy, more of a text for which "la fabrique du pré" is the source text).

Next to us, there is a box of "After Eight" chocolates.

No. 108: February 1972

The play

… and perhaps the play has already begun and, after a little while, I realize (or remember) that I've gone to the suburbs to see it, that I know the actors and the director personally and that, to put it on, the producers might have found money to borrow — maybe 20,000 francs — in Dampierre.

The main character is a Byron who wants to be a Malatesta, which is to say a warlord who crushes his vassals under the pretext of bravery.

In one act, I am an actor: I am to shut off all the lights of a large house and I know that at the death of the lights something terrible will happen. This expectation triggers a light panic in me. But nothing happens.

Later, I'm laid out on a bed with a woman whom I eventually (surprised and stunned as though I had long dreamed of this impossible encounter) recognize as C. We are both overcome with an indescribable pleasure (even the word "ecstasy" gives only a distant, impoverished sense of it). I am on my back. C. mounts me, but she makes a quick movement that jolts me out of her. She begins to moan softly, which quickly excites me again. She kneels and, while she props herself up from behind, I enter her again. Coupled this way, we begin to creep on the carpet.

In the next room there are two men (one of them is F.). They see us, but it doesn't bother us. It's part of the play.

The next act takes place in the country. The heroine has become an ugly old woman. She is raising a bull, which we see escaping some kind of ditch. It doesn't seem real. One character remarks that it would take only a slightly wild cat to take it down.

I have a long discussion with the man seated next to me, which ends up irritating me. He thinks the show is good because it demonstrates that the lord is a bastard, and this is what theater must demonstrate until there are no lords left. I don't know how to respond. I think the show is awful, but that doesn't mean the man next to me isn't right, which makes me more and more uncomfortable.

Between each act, the characters come on stage, wearing outlandish hats. I remark to P. that, the larger the hats, the longer the actors strut about in them, a typical example of directorial demagogy.

The last act is a celebration. Everyone in the audience is invited to come on stage and follow a circuit lined with different attractions (including a game of ping pong). At the exit, they pass in front of a buffet where they are served a cup of coffee, black, no sugar.

After the performance, I called on the director and his wife (who was one of the actresses). I tried to make it clear that I didn't care for the play. The director came back with a sheaf of papers; it was in these texts, he told me, that he found it was permissible to mix Byron and Malatesta.

I flip through the papers. Among them, I find a "Trois Suisses" leaflet advertising three leather telephone cradles. I was looking for exactly such furnishings, and they seem to cost much less than expected; meanwhile, the director, his wife and a third person are indeed seated (having removed their shoes) *in* such furnishings.

I wake up. Or I dream that I wake up.

Much later, it seems — another day — I am in the suburbs with friends of recent minting, with P. and one of my friends, maybe R.

I begin to recount my dream to them. Everything is perfectly clear. I write it down, bit by bit, on slips of paper that I take from my pocket.

I begin the story of my dream backwards, with the part about the telephone cradles.

We leave.

Fruitless search for a taxi, somewhere by a port of Paris …

P., exhausted, has fallen into a sort of landfill filled with yellowish mud, where she stays, facing the ground, motionless.

Half laughing, half worried, I call to her, shouting her name:
"Lise! Lise!"
I realize that I have made a mistake and I call her again, correctly rectifying her name.

Very angry, P. stands up and says to me:

“If you want me to feed you, give me the name I gave to my mother because she fed me!”

I realize that we’re hungry. I search in my pockets and bring out — joy! — thin slices of Chester cheese: the same slices I thought I was writing my dream on.

No. 109: March 1972

Dives

Two of my plays are being performed “urgently.”

The older one isn’t going too badly, but the new one! All of my actors forget their lines. We have to stop the run. Irritation.

Very elderly people pop up like shadows and begin to applaud. Is it because they think it’s over, or because they’ve just arrived?

We run this new play again, but this time to music. A musician is directing the performance with the help of a “mixer” and is doing an excellent job of it.

All of this might be happening in Dampierre.

Conversation on a lawn. One participant is wearing camouflage fatigue pants. We share a common memory (between us and anyone who has jumped in a parachute): the difficulty of jumping with a hatchet at one’s belt. Many accidents.

The game goes on and on

Someone I was with leaves

I no longer know where I am, where I’m going

Furious, I go to the hotel office and demand — in French — that I be shown my room. The customs officer understands and speaks French: she will show me the way.

I get lost in a maze of tiny staircases.

It turns out I’m in a brothel. Three obese, cheerful women attack me in one of the rooms I explore while looking for my own. I run away. Another woman chases me (this isn’t so bad, actually).

No. 110: March 1972

My shoes

Did I lose my shoes? How did I lose my shoes?

It was at a large carnival: you could take a spin in the air by mooring to the end of a rope attached to a ball and chain, or to balloons — the classic gag where the balloon salesman is carried away by his balloons.

The trip ended on a very high platform. To get back to ground level, you could — this was one of the most popular attractions at the carnival — slide through a huge fabric tunnel (like an enormous sleeve filled with folds, like a gigantic spindly intestine): they told me it was very impressive and absolutely safe.

It was quite agreeable, in fact (freefall, but totally safe) and, indeed, perfectly harmless.

Leaving this apparatus, very satisfied, I went to sit down on a bench. It was then that I noticed I had lost my shoes.

I call the employee responsible for the bottom and ask him to go check if my shoes haven't wound up at the bottom of the apparatus. He tells me this is not possible. I insist, adding that these are lace-up boots, nearly new (someone just gave them to me), easily recognizable. But the employee continues to swear this never happens, could never happen. I have to insist for a long time before he decides to go look.

Several times he comes back carrying shoes that are obviously not mine. Finally he finds one, then the other.

A detail I had not yet spotted: at the tips of my soles there are two little metallic pegs that allow the boots to be instantly adapted to ice skates.

No. 111: March 1972 (Blevy)

Reconstruction of a choice

(whose very title indicates the degree to which everything is erased. It concerned a whole series of selections: which side to sleep on, which ear to choose, which lamp to light?)

After a confusing interval, this becomes:

the path of the father or the path of the mother?

No. 112: March 1972 (Blevy)

Books

In the coatroom of my laboratory there is a small window that looks out onto the back of a used bookstore. Leaning out this window, I see a whole pile of books presented such that they look like a single work encased in cardboard with a large black stain on the spine. The books form a set, which looks homogenous to me. The theme is a contemporary school with a medieval name — the Gay Sçavoir or the Saincte Sapience — which name is written in delicate calligraphy in black pencil. Scattered in this pile are some large Derrida books, an art book (maybe Claude Roy) and some thin pamphlets. I know the whole thing belongs to the collection of a friend of J.P., and it strikes me that these are exactly the books I've been searching for for a long time. The bookseller's price is extremely modest, given the value and rarity of the titles, but I can't quite make it out (29 francs? 37 francs?). I would obviously go see the bookseller to make a deal, but of course the store is closed.

The cigarette I was smoking falls into the store and I am quite anxious (not so much out of fear that the butt will set the box of books on fire, more for the disturbing feeling of leaving a sign of my indiscretion) until I realize the butt has fallen onto a marble plaque on the parquet floor, on which there is already one butt, even several butts.

Later. The morning. I get a phone call from J.P. He asks if I'm interested in a stack of books he doesn't want, because a large black stain on the case is a blemish in his library. I tell him I saw them and am planning to buy them. Then he retracts his offer and tells me that, despite the stain, he's keeping them for himself. I am furious. Why would he offer them to me if only to change his mind a moment later?

No. 113: April 1972

The report

I have an extremely important task to finish, and, to do it, I've set up at P.'s. I've used the big table to spread out all the papers I need to write a large report I have to hand in the next morning.

Actually, I'm not working. There are lots of other people at P.'s too and working would be difficult.

At one point, I take a walk with C.F., whom I haven't seen in a long time. I kiss her behind the ear. She asks me whether she should interpret that gesture as meaning that we have "come together." I deny the thought immediately and explain to her the changes that have taken place in my life.

We walk into a medieval courtyard. At the foot of a cathedral stands a Gothic construction, recognizable by its flying buttresses and lancet arch windows. I point out a window to her, saying I live there. She answers:

"But that's at least the fifth floor!"

"No," I say, "it's the ground floor." But, even as I say these words, I feel deeply troubled, since, indeed, from the outside, it's indisputably much higher than the ground floor.

I have returned to P.'s and gone to sleep, even though lots of people are still coming and going in the apartment. I tell myself I'll have time, if I get up in the middle of the night, to finish my report for tomorrow. After all, this isn't the first time I've done this; on the contrary, I'm quite used to doing it.

I take stock of everything I have to write. This report is about a product (something like "Perspirex" or "Respirex," it seems to me that, give or take a letter, it has the name of a product that actually exists) that has been tested on a cruise. I've made a list of everything I need to say. At some moments, it seems like I'm almost done, that nothing will get in my way; at others, I realize with despair that I haven't even finished with the second point on my list (of more than a hundred).

It was Patrice who assigned me this task. At some other point, I had gone down to call him and promised him my report the next day at 9 p.m. That's already much later than the time we had initially agreed on. Patrice accepted (in all projects like this, it's a given that they'll be done at the last minute and they're programmed accordingly), but it's getting less and less likely that I'll make it in

time …

No. 114: April 1972

1

The puzzle

The puzzle

Along with a poorly identified person (maybe my aunt), I am visiting a sort of colonial trading post. At the very back of one room, we come upon a gigantic puzzle laid on a long, slightly inclined table. From far away, it looks like there is a nearly completed puzzle in the center — it's of a Renaissance painting, with very bright and glossy colors — with other objects all around it. Close up, though, you realize the whole thing is a puzzle: the puzzle itself (the painting) is but a fragment of a larger puzzle, unfinished because it can't be finished; the distinguishing feature of the puzzle is that it's made up of volumes (cubes, roughly, or more precisely irregular polyhedra) whose faces can be combined at will: each face of cube A can be combined with each face of cube B, and not just two by two, as in children's (cube) games. Thus there are, if not an infinite number, at least an extremely large number of possible combinations. The painting is only one of them; the fragments surrounding the painting are sketches, drafts, outlines of other puzzles.

As proof, somehow, of this nearly limitless permutation, I take a piece from the side of one of the fragments (which are, I forgot to say, like the puzzle, not square or regular like most puzzles, but somehow "sideless," without a rectilinear border) and turn it over for a few moments, then replace it at the side of another fragment, where it fits immediately.

We go into another room, where we run into my niece Sylvia. It seems to me something very violent happens then (perhaps we break something?)

2

Felice's letters

(it seems that) I have in my possession the catalogue of first editions of Kafka's letters to Felice. There are several editions, ranging from the most prestigious for 056 francs (the 0 must be a printing error) to the most common, which are numbered all the same, for 12 francs. It's one of the latter that I plan to order. It seems that's not so easy to do, but at least, I think, almost happily, when I've received the book it will no doubt contain a card that legally entitles me to order all the other original editions: I will be kept up to date on the most recent releases.

3

The three cats

After a long trip, maybe, I return to Blevy (or is it Dampierre?). My whole family is there. My cat is sleeping in a corner of the room. I am quite surprised to see a second cat (much smaller and striped) in another corner of the room. I go to sit and I step on a third cat; this one is much larger. I don't believe that this third cat really exists — come now, that's impossible! — but it jumps up and scratches my face.

No. 115: April 1972

1

A general history of transportation (excerpt)

It is not difficult to imagine a particularly exhilarating parking system: a giant spiral buried underground, whose slope has been so well calculated that it requires no more effort to go up than it does to go down with, in either case, a uniformly accelerating speed.

The only condition is that there can never be more than one car at a time on the spiral: when there are two, one going up and the other going down, they are powerless but to run into each other, with disastrous consequences. The employees who operate the tollbooths, one down below and the other up top, the exit and entrance of the vehicles, thus have a grave responsibility, but, since they're in cahoots, they can cause accidents easily: what better way to combine the perfect crimes?

The spiral is made not of concrete but of very hard steel; its end is shaped like a screw: the energy generated by the vehicles traveling on it causes it to turn and it buries itself progressively (extremely slowly, but with virtually no cost) in the ground (a particularly hard rock that cannot be otherwise penetrated): this is how the foundations of gigantic buildings are dug out, with the assumption that there are several screws, which is to say several parking lots.

2

It's fairly easy to go from the above to a project for a General History of Transportation, automobiles in particular. The director of the project is Alain Trutat, who was particularly enthusiastic when I suggested that we do a report on one of the least understood points — and yet one of the most important in this story: the hispanification (or more precisely the castillation, or castillification, or castillinization) of the Gascony concurrent to the rise to power of Catherine of Medici: even today, Gascon mentality, morals, and customs are completely incomprehensible if you forget that, for several decades, Gascony was purely and simply a colony, a protectorate, an appendage of Catalonia.

I begin my report in a relatively banal classroom, before a scattered audience. Quickly I realize I haven't prepared enough and, worse, I can no longer get my listeners to understand the simple relationship between the history of the automobile and the history of Spain.

It's going down the tubes. A total flop. I'm stammering. Alain Trutat leaves the room. To help create a diversion, someone suggests that we make music. A multi-instrument orchestra is established.

I go out to take a walk. Maybe I want to find Trutat? I walk in a large French-style park covered in snow.

I return to the room. A second orchestra has been formed under the direction of R.K., who seems to be the only competent musician in the group and who has taken matters in hand with great authority and, for that matter, efficacy. I want to play the flute, but I notice as I'm taking it up that I've broken the tip: I was holding the flute in one hand, and in the other a kind of rosary made of three long olive stones, white and maybe wooden, which was supposed to constitute the mouthpiece of the flute.

A bit later, someone maybe hands me a clarinet.

3

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No. 116: May 1972

The monkey

After various twists and turns, I find myself sharing an apartment with a stranger. One of the oddities of this apartment is that it has a huge entrance-hall — much larger, in fact, than the other rooms, including the bedrooms. Maybe the shared entrance causes the first problem.

In any case, I've written a score and this stranger, who says he is a musician, has offered to play it. But I suspect he actually intends to steal it.

Perhaps to apologize for this tactlessness, he introduces me to Adolf Hitler.

Adolf Hitler is a grotesque clown, with pale skin and long hair: he is played emphatically and exaggeratedly, and at first ridicules his aide-de-camp, General Hartmann, a good old fat ruddy-nosed German who is obviously drunk: he can't find the right key on his keychain, and is trying desperately to put his outfit in order — shirt and suspenders untucked, shako on his ear — to present himself before his Führer.

Hitler begins by sweetly saying many nice things about Mariani. But bit by bit, as his speech continues, it gets increasingly pernicious and concludes as a torrent of foul curses.

Adolf Hitler's eminence grise is a monkey; it has a very long tail that ends in a hand (in a black glove?) and does not stop playing with itself (exactly like Marsupilami from the Spirou cartoons) to accompany and underscore its master's speech.

But I think at one point it loses its glove, or its whole hand.

Sudden change of scenery. Deathly silence. On a vast esplanade, a crowd of soldiers dressed in black is pushing everyone back while the monkey, at once terrible and grotesque, advances through the middle of the grand plaza. He is sitting on a little chariot (the carriage of a cannon), tail pointing in front of him like a tank cannon.

A child is running. One of the soldiers turns around quickly as the child passes and knocks him down with his rifle butt.

I am at a demonstration. We are singing "La Jeune Garde." The

song fades out slowly. The silence is oppressive. I sense the police just in front of us and know they are going to charge.

I know this is only a scene from *Duck, You Sucker!*, but still, why on earth do I always get myself into these situations?

I managed to take refuge in a building under construction. I'm hidden in a little square room without a door (I had to enter through the ceiling). This is where the toilets will be; the plumbing is not yet installed, but there are already footprints in the cement.

No. 117: May 1972

1

The joint

Large demonstration for le Joint Français. Threat of clashes between the demonstrators and the police. I almost panic at the idea of being arrested, brought to a police station and beaten.

These things do not happen.

2

(forgotten)

3

(forgotten)

No. 118: June 1972

The double party

I'm visiting a house with the bartender from a bar I go to often. There is a glass wall, which is trembling. The bartender explains: it's because it's in contact with the metallic posts of the awning. There is a clogged sink. To unclog it, you first have to fill another: thanks to some sort of system of communicating vases, the flow of the normal sink will enable the flow of the clogged sink.

There is a large party at my parents' house. I'm sitting on a couch between P. and a young woman with whom I am flirting. P. gets up angrily; I don't understand why. I make a date with the young woman for 11:30 p.m.

I take a train. I cross a city. Somewhere, an incline in the sidewalk is replaced by a moving walkway.

I get to Dampierre, where there is a big party. Almost everyone who was at the party at my parents' house has come.

I meet my aunt, who is with Z.; Z. looks like another one of my aunts and has the same voice as her (a disagreeable voice); she says to me:

"There's a concert in the garden."

At the dinner table. P. is across from me; she's been drinking heavily.

I didn't tell the young lady where we would meet.

I cross the property. Many things have changed. I have a hard time recognizing the old basements, which have become large vaulted rooms; I meet people whom I have seen before in the same place, a woman, in particular, who may have been my mistress; she gives me an enigmatic smile that seems to signify that our relationship is quite finished.

I can't get over how unpleasant Z.'s voice has become to me.

A large lunch is served on a huge esplanade looking down on the entrance to the property. The people arriving down below look like ants; sometimes they actually are ants: someone sweeps the path to

keep them from entering.

The young woman comes to meet me; she's wearing a hat that is a sort of turban topped with a tiny umbrella; I am pleased that she knew she was supposed to meet me here.

No. 119: June 1972

Rue de l'Assomption

I have rented an apartment at 10 or 12 rue de l'Assomption, beneath where Jo A. lives on the second floor.

I'm getting ready to repaint it.

I go to buy groceries on rue Fontaine, but I can't find good cheese. I would have liked to find a very dry goat cheese.

I come back. J. has come to help me paint. But neither she nor P. wants to go back out to look for cheese.

I go down myself, furious, but my anger subsides once I get to the street.

I pass in front of the house where I lived between my tenth and twentieth years, in front of the Lycée Molière.

What a shame, I think, that this isn't my month to describe this street!

There have been major changes on the street: just after the butcher shop at no. 52, a cinema — no, that one I remember I know, but a second cinema, brand new, and even a third, where they're playing a movie about auto racing starring Maximilien SHELL (the name in big letters) and Trintignant (but no "Jean-Louis" and the name very small).

I go into a cheese shop on avenue Mozart. The cheeses look like fat slices of brain. Many entanglements. No goat cheese. It takes ages to get served.

I buy a single (fairly small) piece of cheese. It costs 8 francs 70. That's highway robbery! Moreover, it takes ages to pay too: the merchant makes a long series of little signals to the clerk, who passes them on to the cashier. The cashier asks me for 8 francs 65.

I go back to pick up my parcel. The merchant initially gives me a lovely one, large and beautifully wrapped, then changes his mind, because that one's not mine; but he can't find mine. He looks for another bit of cheese to give me, but the only pieces he can find are rotten. Meanwhile, he has begun make — extremely slowly — a

Tunisian delicacy: making it the traditional way is an art unto itself; the gherkins are cut lengthwise in extremely fine slices, the different sizes applied just so.

A conversation about Tunisia starts up among the clients. Someone asks me if the climate is good for sinus infections. No, I say, it's too humid. (but) Marcel C. goes there to take care of his rheumatism. He goes to Djerba. He has friends there, which lets him get away from the tourist frenzy that, as they say, rules the Island.

To get back to rue de l'Assomption, I will take the other half of the rectangular perimeter formed by

No. 120: June 1972

Hypotheses

… was I rolling along at a good clip, backward, on the road that was supposed to lead us to the highway? It was a large road, more reminiscent of an esplanade, and crisscrossed in all directions by vehicles bearing down at full speed …

There were four of us in a rented car, P., J., a strong tall Englishman we didn't know, and me. The Englishman was driving. We were going to join the front, to go fight …

"No, that was in a Truffaut film …"

Near Auxerre, we reach the highway. We can see it in front of us, beyond a wide gate: it's a wide, straight road that an uninterrupted tide of whirring cars is crossing from right to left.

For the moment, we're in some sort of drugstore; we don't have time to stop to eat. At most, I manage to steal a few bits of sugar.

No. 121: July 1972

The rent

Just as I'm paying my rent, I realize that the last three bills in a 1000-franc roll (ten 100-franc bills) have been replaced with pieces of paper from restaurant tablecloths I once wrote on.

I find myself in an immense restaurant, so big they've put a sauna in the bathroom.

No. 122: July 1972

1

The wedding

In Blevy. Bernard comes to pick me up. We're supposed to film a minute of *A Man Asleep*. First I have to feed the cat and change its litter (the litter bag is quite full).

Bernard is accompanied by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 children.

We are filming (in Orly).

We come back. I'm not particularly happy; we pass, with difficulty, among second-hand shops: they are on the bare ground, selling heavily ornamented wooden plaques.

2

I meet S.B. For lack of money, she has not gone on vacation; she's planning to go to Dampierre. I suggest that we go together: I could easily borrow the house in Villard (our old family home), or the one in Druyes, or others still.

We go, surely just for an hour (with the implicit intention of sleeping together), into Henri C.'s apartment on rue L. Henri C., who is not in Paris at the moment, has, in the same building — not at all a modern building, quite the opposite, an old building — two apartments: a flat on the ground floor (where I lived for a while) and a large studio at the top.

The doorman doesn't recognize me, but proves to be very friendly. The key is in the mailbox and the mailbox is open. The key is thin and twisted; it doesn't look at all like the key for a lock, but rather like the key for a deadbolt.

In the apartment. Large sheets of paper are spread out on the floor, with chalk marks on them. Then 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, many young people: they're Americans, dancers. I understand immediately that my niece has given them the key, which they confirm. They eat, and hand us plates with compartments for avocados, tomatoes, and?. They're not the ones who were there (or in Villard) the previous week, but they're from the same university. We talk about various things, and soon about Dampierre, which they know well.

The ballet begins, a marriage pantomime. Gags. The groom's costume: yellow socks, white pants that go down to mid-calf, green shirt that hides his arms completely. He looks not so much like a one-armed man as like a bust.

The whole marriage procession passes in front of us, but, from time to time doubles of the wedding characters pop up: it's very funny; there are more and more of them, and at the end it's the same procession as it was at the beginning, but there is no longer a single dancer from the original lineup: *all of them have changed*.

Applause, like for a sports play.

The three main characters (the groom, the bride and the priest) are fake-decapitated, like in the

"Mysteries of the Organism."

3

Thérèse and Marcel C. arrive; Thérèse is dressed like a lunchlady; she comes in through the door and sings. Marcel is at the end of a hallway. He is holding a guitar and singing too. I remember that they used to live here. But I didn't know there was a *secret passage* between Marcel's and Henri C.'s.

Next to the large room that we're in, a long windowed hallway leads to a narrow room that's probably a workshop or a storeroom for house painting equipment.

While wandering in an unknown room in his own apartment one day long ago, Marcel found himself at Henri C.'s.

No. 123: August 1972

The workshop

Major changes are being made in my lab. During a meeting, my boss asks me to devote my time solely to writing manuscripts and to leave the organization of the documentary filing to a young woman he has just hired.

The young woman is not very pretty, nor particularly pleasant, but she proves to be remarkably efficient; in particular, she uncovers an official document that allows each member of the lab (1) to have regular interviews in room B1 or B2 with a confessor of his or her choice and (2) to visit the painter.

It turns out that, like all universities (be they of medicine or fine arts), ours has a "functional workshop" and the young woman takes me there. Sure enough, I was wondering where this door led.

I enter, expecting to find that the painter is nothing but a dirty penpusher.

"Wait, I recognize this!" I exclaim.

It is, in fact, none other than the workshop of the painter Bizet, and you can immediately see all his major pieces covered with gridded patterns. The workshop is an immense room with a very high ceiling; the painter is a very tall old man; he shows me around his workshop graciously, but you can tell he's annoyed about it (but he can work here only on the condition that he gives tours). He makes mostly tapestries, but he also shows me some drawings, many done on graph paper.

T., one of the researchers from the lab, comes next, running, to visit the workshop. The painter seems more interested in her than he was in me, even though she starts talking about his painting in an especially banal way, saying something like: "Now that's not very realistic!" which doesn't seem to offend the painter (whereas I am shocked).

The painter takes T. by the waist and leans his other arm on my shoulder: I am much smaller than they are.

Other people come into the workshop. On the ground are two banknotes that turn out to be large amounts.

No. 124: August 1972

The denunciation

1941.

The fabric merchant owed my father money and decided to denounce him to the SS and, at the same time as my father, his own son (or just an employee) who was found distributing clandestine newspapers.

It's much more complicated than that. But that's what it is.

The SS comes to arrest us. They have black uniforms and tight-fitting, spherical helmets, like masks. They're preparing to arrest the boss too, but he lifts my head by the chin and points to the little scar underneath it.

We cross the town.

If only we could go have a cup of coffee. It seems so simple, but it's impossible. I've already given up. The casino is closed too, or closed to Jews. But a light shines from inside.

We go back the way we came. We pass the fabric merchant's store again. It's a boutique on the corner of two streets; neo-Gothic architecture (turrets, machicolations). It looks fancy. We look at it with a well-justified bitterness.

We arrive at the train station.

Disorder.

I know what's waiting for us. I have no hope. Get it over with. Or maybe a miracle … One day, learn to survive?

My father dips his left boot in the icy water of a pond. He thinks this will revive an old wound, which will maybe get him declared unfit for service. But everyone watches him do it, indifferent.

They put us in a cabin reserved for monsters. Two young children, legs cut off at the knees, a boy and a girl, naked, wriggling like worms. Myself, I have become a young snake (or was it a fish?).

At the end of a long boat trip, we will reach the camp.

Our wardens, torturers with degenerate faces, pale, ruddy, cruel, dumb, are crowned with ridiculous titles: "(Worm?) Disinfectant Supervisors"; "Adjuncts to the Conversation of (Preserves?)."

Soon their faces are surrounded with frills, lace, curlicues; this

becomes an album I am paging through, a memorial album, pretty like a theatrical program, with advertisements at the end …

I am back in this town. There is a large memorial ceremony. I attend, sickened, scandalized, and finally moved.

I arrive in the middle of a crowd. There's a party. Lots of scattered records, they're searching for one to put on a little record player. I burst into tears. J.L. scolds me for it.

I am a little child. On the side of the road, I stop a motorist and ask him to dare, for me, to go see the gardener from the big orchard to get back my ball, which went over the wall (and, in noting this, the return of a real memory: 1947, rue de l'Assomption, I was playing with a ball against the wall of the convent, just across from our building).

afterword by Daniel Levin Becker

Georges Perec's bibliography is a wonderland of invention and a sterling model of creative discipline. His facility with language and mastery of structure — see, respectively, *A Void*, a 311-page whodunit written without the letter E, and *Life A User's Manual*, a sprawling novel governed by myriad mathematical and procedural rules — were rivaled only by his tireless will to challenge himself, to invent new problems for the solutions he seemed to generate as a byproduct of breathing. Discovering his work was what first led me to the Oulipo, the Parisian lit-nerd collective in whose ranks I have since joined him; before that, it was simply an affirmation of the great things that become possible when you approach even the wispiest of your passions as though it were honest, calculable work.

But Perec isn't important just for his repeated demonstrations of technical genius. His value lies also in the complexities behind his writing, the flaws and rifts and stubbornly inscrutable details: his humanity, in a word. Here is a man who didn't just write a novel without the letter E — so fluently, at that, that one professional book critic failed to notice anything amiss — but who made a dumb mechanical exercise into a project with deep personal roots and great emotional stakes. (For proof, look no further than the hit single of the book you're holding, dream no. 95, which finds him haunted by the post-publication discovery of hundreds of overlooked, unexterminated Es.) In every sentence he writes, no matter how constrained or convoluted, you can find the trace of a person.

The privilege of *La Boutique Obscure*, a collection of dreams Perec recorded during one of his most productive periods — he worked on essays, reviews, screen and radio plays, crossword puzzles, and what would be for some years the world's longest palindrome — is that it offers an uncommonly direct encounter with that person. It's an invitation to interpret the patterns and echoes and contradictions of his dreams, psychologically and linguistically; it's an occasion to spend time in the company of a brilliantly idiosyncratic mind with all its tics and perversities fully present and ready to be accounted for. If this "nocturnal autobiography," as Perec called it, lacks the polish of his more conventional gestures toward memoir, it may be even more illuminating of who he really was.

So why has it never before been translated into English? Perhaps it's the lack of polish; perhaps it's the relative lack of artifice, the vertiginous and sometimes unbecoming absence of the armor Perec so plainly sought in literature. (His biographer, David Bellos, tells us as much in citing Perec's own reservations about publishing the dreams

in French.) But perhaps it's also because *La Boutique Obscure* doesn't fit with certain ideas we've come to have about how to read its author. When we speak of constraint around Perec's work, that is, we tend to imagine sturdy, tangible rules applied at the level of the word or sentence or chapter; we imagine the one-sentence directive of *A Void* or the 300-page *cahier des charges* of *Life A User's Manual*, but we expect something we can verify. Here, the *cahier des charges* is no less than Perec's life; the constraints, such as they are, are perpetually sublimated, subterranean, sometimes literally subliminal.

Take dream no. 84, in which Perec acts in a play attended by a senile *maire*, a word that translates to "mayor" but sounds like "mother." This is a pregnant verbal double entendre — as even the crudest biographical sketch will tell you, Perec's mother disappeared in the early 1940s, most likely at Auschwitz — but is it the product of pure chance, or a canny bit of authorial artifice, or the work of a dreaming brain so attuned to the slippery play of word and sound that it manufactured an entire character out of a homophone? Likewise, in dream no. 28 Perec misattributes a line from La Fontaine, calling it a "Shakespearean proverb." Human error? Conscious misdirection? Trick of the accomplished trickster's own mind?

There is no shortage of such puzzles throughout the book, and it seems worth noting here a sampling of the formulations whose cleverness, intentional or otherwise, resisted my attempts to carry the full nuance over into English. There are elegant phraselets such as *M. m'aime* in no. 58, which I have left as the literal "M. loves me" without hoping to maintain the echo of the M. sound; there are double meanings such as that of the word *coupure* in no. 83 (and elsewhere), which can gloss as both "press clipping" and "banknote." There is the quicksand trap of Perec's crossword clues, which mercifully manifests only twice, both times in dream no. 89. (A serviceable equivalent of the second clue might have been "A Gay who isn't," for TALESE.) I should also confess that the lexical trespass of "shellevator" for *coquilleobus* is mine and mine alone.

A few more procedural notes. Typographical irregularities — errant periods, open parentheses that never close, other such sources of dull anguish — are present in Perec's original (and if it seems strange to you that a punctuation mark should have as much emotional weight as the word "mother," I'm frankly not sure what you're doing reading Perec.) Titles of Perec's works are given in their English translations, though this should not be construed as a claim that any Perec text in translation is truly *equivalent* to its original counterpart. For more on those originals, and much more on the circumstances that inspired many of these dreams, I commend to the curious reader Bellos's *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*. Finally, I would

be remiss in not thanking E.R., N.R., I.M., F.F., and R.D. for their various forms of help in making the preceding just slightly less obscure.

La Boutique Obscure is not a harder book for a translator than *A Void*, certainly, but neither is it altogether easier: intellectually, at least, it's much more straightforward to recreate a novel without the letter E than it is to intuit the subconscious logic and illogic of a man who at one point in his life *chose* to write a novel without the letter E, and was even known to spend an evening here or there eliding it from conversation. But, again, Perec's value isn't about straightforwardness: it's about the work he did to put his self into writing, and the work that we as readers get to do to extract it. In the best of his books, that work goes on well after the translation stops. I hope that's the case here, and that it's as much a labor of love for you as it was for me.

notes

Примечания

1

Numbers given are dream numbers.